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Spiritual and philosophical concerns

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SPIRITUAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS

By

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INTRODUCTION

It does not take in-depth observation to see that there is a strong emphasis in our culture on analysis and detachment when it comes to the world of art, either with reference to the reason for its creation or its appreciation. Reading articles by contemporary art critics in the best publications is a chilling experience. Rhetoric abounds--a work of art is dissected and the formal characteristics laid bare. On the basis of these characteristics it is so over-analyzed and pigeonholed that nothing of the spirit or emotion remains.

At this point in time our reaction to a work of art and our interpretation of our reactions are largely a result of a "mental climate" created by three centuries of scientific materialism. A "mental climate" is a very powerful and pervasive phenomenon; it consists of the fundamental assumptions which are current during any particular period and which are the common ground of the different world outlooks constructed during that period. These assumptions do not exist as specific and explicit philosophies, but, rather, as the basis of the philosophies created during their time. Nothing is more influential than such a climate as it allows only certain growths to come to maturity, while stunting and warping all others.

It sets the major priorities of the time.¹

The mental climate characteristic of our modern world is most clearly manifested in science, for there the activity is conditioned by the assumptions in a perfectly direct manner. These same assumptions, for the most part unconscious, can be found in much of modern philosophy and aesthetic criticism. One manifestation of these centuries of scientific materialism is that our reactions to a work of art are no longer accepted by us in their purity, but are immediately interpreted and adapted to serve the general outlook. For this reason, interpretation is based on secondary issues and formal characteristics, which are what have survived in this prevalent mental climate.²

Before scientific materialism, art was akin to religion. The spiritual nature of the endeavor was recognized and given due respect. As the mental climate began to change, art lost touch with its religious context, but held its place for a time as a "secular form of belief." Art and spirituality were still connected. This is no longer the case. As the noted art historian and author of Shock of the New, Robert Hughes, says:

... art is no longer the repository of idealism
We live in a deeply pessimistic society which has
pretty much lost its faith in the ability of art

¹J. W. N. Sullivan, Beethoven--His Spiritual Development, (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 14.

²Ibid.

to embody religious or highly philosophical states of mind.³

Much of twentieth century art has become over-intellectualized and impotent. It typifies a certain detachment, alienation and sense of loss. Art is a reflection of society and this negativism, in general, reflects our mental climate today.

There is a cause for hope, however, because there are still people who demand more. Talking to the Oxford University Poetry Society, Robert Graves, one of the great poets of our time, states:

"This is a critical, not a poetic age," I am told. "Inspiration is out. Contemporary poems must reflect the prevailing analytic spirit." But I am old-fashioned enough to demand 'baraka', an inspirational gift not yet extinct, which defies critical analysis.⁴

There is still more reason for optimism. Over the past several hundred years, science formed a closed system, the validity of which is now being annihilated by science itself, through discoveries in twentieth century physics. Aspects of nature and the universe which were accepted as undisputed fact have been questioned and revised. Former scientific conceptions were found to be inadequate in the very fields in which they achieved their greatest triumphs.⁵

Although scientists and a portion of the educated

³Robert Hughes, "Talk of the Town," The New Yorker Magazine, January 26, 1981, p. 26.

⁴Graham Collier, Art and the Creative Consciousness, (New Jersey:Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 2.

⁵Sullivan, Beethoven--His Spiritual Development, p. 13.

public are aware of these alterations, change for the general populace will come slowly. We are now experiencing the mental climate that took three hundred years to form and the understanding and acceptance of alternatives will take time.

The act of artistic creation and the events surrounding it have always retained elements of the inexplicable and spiritual. As much as we investigate aspects of this phenomenon, much lies outside understanding or the ability to clearly categorize. The act of creation still holds a touch of the mysterious for the artist as well as the viewer.

Despite current emphasis on scientific analysis and refusing to accept the death of the spirit, I will address spiritual concerns in creativity as I believe art is the form language of the human soul. Through creation in art we see the psychic unfolding of the personality. Art enables one to make manifest the deepest psychic and personal experiences of life.

Even though I will address the topic of spiritual concerns in creativity from different angles and many peoples' perspectives, I feel my major point is aptly stated by Graham Collier, author of Art and the Creative Consciousness:

It seems that ultimately ... we must relate inspiration to the creative faculty in finding meaning and value in existence; inevitably, such insights go beyond material and sensory realities to those more spiritual and abstract.⁶

⁶Robert Henri, The Art Spirit, (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1960), p. 71.

With this spiritual base in mind, I will attempt to unveil some of the sources of inspiration and creativity. My contention is that the act of creation, for some artists, is a manifestation of a spiritual search, an inquiry into the nature of the self and the universe. It is a quest to find and understand the natural psychic essence, in which lies a universal and fundamental principle.

The first section will deal with my own spiritual concerns--those of Zen Buddhism. The goal of Zen is to assist and guide a person toward the direct experience of seeing into his own innermost nature--a common psychic nature existing in everyone on an unconscious level. This might be said to represent the ultimate level of the creative

The second segment, on creativity, will reiterate some of the same concerns and characteristics, but from a different vantage point.

The third part of the dissertation will involve three artists, whose work is well known, but who are generally perceived in a narrow framework. The formal aspects of their art are well documented. However, the reasons behind their creativity are little known. By delving into the spiritual foundations of their inspiration, the paths they have followed, and the advice they give, it will be seen that they coincide with elements of the direct spiritual search of Zen as well as to the topic of creativity.

I ask that you read this treatise with a mind open to seeing the direct philosophical connections as well as

with a sensitivity toward the more subtle sympathies,
the peripheral likenesses, the echoes.

CHAPTER I

Zen Buddhism

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is just one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.⁷

This quote by the noted psychologist, William James, in Varieties of Religious Experience, seems to be an appropriate way to introduce a subject that to many seems mystifying and illusive--Zen. There are hundreds of treatments of the subject and it may seem presumptuous to add more, but this particular attempt will be flavored by a deep personal concern and involvement as well as the more common objective investigation into the topic. I do not plan to delve into esoteric texts or dwell in lengthy ideologies based on religious beliefs, although Buddhism in general includes all of this. I will not dally on seeming contradictions or cater to apparent illogical aspects of Zen--they do exist and will be discussed. However, the purpose is not to confuse but to show how these aspects can simultaneously exist without conflict.

The reason for the importance in understanding some

⁷Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics, (Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala Publications, 1976), p. 17.

aspects of Zen in this investigation into the spiritual concerns of creativity is that it represents the ultimate find, as it were; that is, it offers a discipline through which the deepest levels of the self are able to be directly experienced.

First, what is Zen? Zen is a crystalization of Buddhism; a sect that has clarified and strengthened certain basic Buddhist principles over the centuries. The foundation of everything is that the Buddha had an experience which dealt with an altering of the level of consciousness or state of mind.

This experience was the direct perception and understanding of an "inner nature"--a nature inherent in everyone. The experience is commonly called enlightenment. All of Buddhist doctrine grew from this experience and the Buddha's teachings. There are two major schools of Buddhism--Mahayana and Hinayana. We will deal only with the development of Mahayana and its culmination in Zen.

The doctrines that evolved in India as a result of the Buddha's enlightenment experience were not unlike the typical Indian in temperament. The teachings were embedded in highly metaphysical abstractions and complicated Yogic systems. This was sympathetic to the nature of the Indian people and there was no conflict.

However, when Buddhism moved on to China a change took place. The Chinese people, being more practical minded, adapted the principles so that the central point could be

grasped more readily. At that time, Confucianism and Taoism existed side by side. Confucianism, the official state religion, was the guide for ethics and social interaction. It was a strict moral code and influenced China for twenty-five hundred years. Taoism encompassed the spiritual. Taoism was based on a belief in universal order and harmony. Buddhism captured the emotional needs of the Chinese and meshed quickly with the indigenous Taoism. The Ch'an school of Buddhism evolved from this blending. When Ch'an reached Japan another change took place.

The Japanese also wanted to adapt the teachings so that they would be more appropriate for their own society. Their aim was to break the teachings down to the ultimate essence and develop the quickest and most efficient way to train their people. What followed was centuries of refinement--stripping the principles of Buddhism to the core. The tenets of Buddhism, stripped bare, are what Zen is about.

The most important fact to be grasped is that these teachings are ultimately a matter of personal discipline and experience. No amount of reading, theorizing, contemplation or the like will ever make one a Zen master. The experience that illumined the life of the Buddha can easily be distorted or lost sight of in the teachings and embellishments of his followers. Therefore, as is so often stated in books and by teachers, all the volumes written are only "a finger pointing at the moon and should not be mistaken for the moon." All external authority is ultimately

rejected by Zen and the only acceptable thing is to be found in your own personal search and its experiential consequences.

Zen, therefore, offers as little as possible for the mind to seize upon and thus forces the student into a face-to-face confrontation with the question of his own nature and existence. This is not a pleasant confrontation and it takes tremendous perseverance to see it through.

A second pertinent question: "Is Zen a religion?" Here we meet our first contradiction. Zen is not a religion in the traditional sense. Zen has no God; there is no one to be worshipped and no religious rules to follow. The "masters" are few and prefer to teach by example more than lecture. There is very little to hold onto intellectually. Theory is rejected as irrelevant. However, Zen can be looked upon as having religious overtones as it enables you, with discipline and training, to answer certain fundamental questions about your nature and your place in the universe. Therefore, Zen aids in answering metaphysical issues and in that can be viewed as ultimately religious in nature.

The strength of Zen stems from the fact that the reality upon which it rests, the enlightenment experience, once glimpsed is self-evident and irrefutable. It is the discovery, once and for all, of life's deep meaning and purpose--not an intellectual, learned or describable discovery, but the direct encountering of a new experience,

of an unsuspected stratum of awareness or consciousness.

This revelation is possible to anyone, anywhere. It has undoubtedly been experienced by thousands of persons scattered through every country through every age. Revelation is a strictly personal development and can never be found by following doctrines or delving into esoteric intellectual avenues. On the contrary, it is founded in the most fundamental day-to-day events and commonplace occurrences.⁸

If Zen cannot "teach" you to have this experience or change in consciousness, if you must ultimately go it alone, and if thousands of people have experienced this without Zen training, then why bother with Zen at all? The answer is that Zen specializes in the matter and knows the ground. Zen acts as a guide. It can be done alone, but it generally takes longer and depends much more on trial and error. Zen offers a sense of direction.⁹

The enlightenment experience is the essence of Zen. Without enlightenment it is just so many hollow words and there is no Zen. The enlightenment experience goes under many names: awakening, satori, kensho, seeing into one's true nature or true mind. The famous Swiss psychologist, Dr. Carl G. Jung, talks about the ability of the Western mind to understand the characteristics of enlightenment

⁸Hugh Woodworth, Zen, The Turn Towards Life, (Boston: Branden Press, 1969), p. 34.

⁹Ibid., p. 5.

in his introduction to a basic text on Zen Buddhism:

Earlier on I raised the question of whether we have anything like satori in the West. If we except the sayings of our Western mystics, a superficial glance discloses nothing that could be likened to it in even the faintest degree. According to our thinking, the possibility that there are steps in the development of consciousness does not exist.¹⁰

Accepting this unfamiliarity of terrain and being open in attitude to the existence of other levels of consciousness, it is then possible to look at the phenomenon of enlightenment and come to some intellectual understanding of it, however superficial that must necessarily be. A word of caution: I use the term "levels of consciousness" loosely. This is not to be confused with the different psychic or mental states induced by hypnosis, drugs, psychic powers or extrasensory perception. These are shallow manifestations of powers of the mind and should not be confused with an enlightened state. For example, if a person is seriously involved in Zen training there will be a point where psychic powers are developed to one degree or another. A psychic is in touch with an area of mind inaccessible to ordinary consciousness, but this is not enlightened. An enlightened mind perceives unlimited dimensions of consciousness and this level naturally encompasses psychic perceptions. If anything, these shallow manifestations of the powers of the mind are seductive and can distract from a serious practice. A trained Zen master will guide a

¹⁰Soetsu Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsmen, (Kodansha International, Ltd. through Harper & Row, New York, 1978), p. 16.

student past them and not allow him to dwell on them. Roshi Philip Kapleau states: "This is to squander your energies in the foolish pursuit of the inconsequential."¹¹

Before I continue it is important to clarify two words that will be used frequently from this point on. First, the word Mind. You will notice that it is often used with a capital "M". This is deliberate and will be found this way in most texts and references. It differentiates Mind in the Zen framework from mind in the normal boundaries of our everyday discussions. Mind in the Zen terminology is far more than what we conceive of as our thinking self. It is more than the common category of consciousness, unconsciousness and the like. Mind in Zen terms encompasses all of these and more. As enlightenment is often called "seeing into one's true Mind" it seems appropriate to take a further look into what this Mind means. Dr. Jung states:

Because a child is physically small and its conscious thoughts are scarce and simple, we do not realize the far-reaching complications of the infantile mind that are based on its original identity with its prehistoric psyche. That "original mind" is just as much present and still functioning in the child as the evolutionary stages of mankind are in its embryonic body.¹²

The underlining is mine as I feel this point to be critical. Dr. Jung believes that just as the body comes into this

¹¹Tomio Hirai, M.D., Zen and the Mind, (Tokyo: Japan Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 41.

¹²C. G. Jung, Man and His Symbols, (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 99.

world at birth with vestiges of past forms, the mind also has these traces. Curiously, we find it plausible that the body can retain this ancestry but find it difficult to accept that the mind also has its history. Just as the body has its evolutionary markings so, too, does the mind. This is manifest in the form of Mind. More on Dr. Jung's theories relating to this can be found in his writings on "archetypal images" and symbols in Man and His Symbols. In this long but important passage Dr. Jung talks about the characteristics of Mind in the Zen framework:

The world of consciousness is inevitably a world full of restrictions, of walls blocking the way. It is of necessity always one-sided, resulting from the essence of consciousness. No consciousness can harbour more than a very small number of simultaneous conceptions. All else must lie in shadow, withdrawn from sight. To increase the simultaneous content creates immediately a dimming of consciousness; confusion, in fact, to the point of disorientation. Consciousness does not simply demand, but "is", of its very essence, a strict limitation to the few and hence the distinct. For our general orientation we are indebted simply and solely to the fact that through attentiveness we are able to effect a comparatively rapid succession of images. Attentiveness is, however, an effort of which we are not permanently capable. We have therefore to make do, so to speak, with a minimum of simultaneous perceptions and successions of images. Hence wide fields of possible perceptions are permanently eliminated, and consciousness is always bound to the narrowest circle. What would happen if an individual consciousness were to succeed in embracing at one glance a simultaneous picture of all that it could imagine is beyond conception. If man has already succeeded in building up the structure of the world from the few clear things that he can perceive at one and the same time, what godly spectacle would present itself to his eyes were he able to perceive a great deal all at once and distinctly? This question only concerns perceptions that are "possible" to us. But if we add to those the unconscious contents--i.e. contents which are not yet, or no longer, capable of consciousness--then try to imagine a complete spectacle, why this is beyond the most audacious fantasy. This

unimaginableness is of course a complete impossibility in the conscious form, but in the unconscious form it is a fact, inasmuch as all that is seething below is an ever-present potentiality of conception. The unconscious is an unglimpsable completeness of all subliminal psychic factors, a "total exhibition" of potential nature. It constitutes the entire disposition from which consciousness takes fragments from time to time.¹³

This complete potentiality of conception is mind-boggling. So, when Mind is used in this way it clearly signifies more than our common usage.

Another word that will be used with an expanded and specific meaning is "ego". The usual definitions are not applicable here. Roshi Philip Kapleau's books, Zen, Dawn in the West and The Three Pillars of Zen each have definitions of ego that in combination aptly define the word:

According to Buddhism, the notion of an ego, i.e. awareness of one-self as a discrete individuality, is a delusion. It arises because, misled by our bifurcating intellect (the sixth sense) into postulating the dualism of "myself" and "not myself", we are led to think and act as though we were a separated entity confronted by a world external to us. Thus in the unconscious the idea of "I", or selfhood, becomes fixed, and from this arise such thought patterns as 'I hate this, I love that; this is mine, that is yours'. Nourished by this fodder, the ego-I comes to dominate the mind, attacking whatever threatens its domination and grasping at anything which will enlarge its power. Antagonism, greed, and alienation, culminating in suffering, are the inevitable consequences of this circular process.¹⁴

In Buddhism ego refers to the notion of oneself as a fixed and discrete entity separate from other selves and from an "outside world". Thus a silently stubborn or self-deprecating person may be said to have as

¹³D. T. Suzuki, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964), pp. 21-22.

¹⁴Roshi Philip Kapleau, The Three Pillars of Zen, (New York and Tokyo: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1967), p. 330.

strong an ego as one who is, say, proud and domineering.
Through awakening the illusory nature of the ego is
seen through.¹⁵

The underlining again is mine. This is certainly an expanded way to look at the word ego, just as Mind in the Zen framework is far more comprehensive than our general understanding of mind. With this in mind it is now possible to arrive at a very simplistic but essentially accurate definition of enlightenment.

Going back to the two words I just defined, enlightenment is the experience of dissolution of the ego and seeing into your true Mind. It is an insight into the nature of the universe and your place in it. This may seem confusing or alien to our general Western conceptions and patterns of thought and the more attempts made at clarification the more complicated it may appear. This may be part of its nature. Dr. Jung states:

... one cannot escape the impression that, with all that is bizarre in it, satori is, in fact, a matter of natural occurrence, of something so very simple that one fails to see the wood for the trees, and in attempting to explain it, invariably says the very thing that drives others into the greatest confusion.¹⁶

Confusion does result from trying to describe the experience.

One of the major characteristics of the experience is that it transcends verbal explanation. As Faust declares, "All our theorization fails to touch reality."¹⁷ ~~The word~~

¹⁵Roshi Philip Kapleau, Zen, Dawn in the West, (New York: Anchor Press, 1979), p. 291.

¹⁶Suzuki, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, p. 13.

¹⁷Ibid., p.41.

is not the thing. As enlightenment is an experience, and the most powerful and direct of experiences, explaining the fullness of it is impossible. Lao Tsu says in his opening of the Tao Te Ching:

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.¹⁸

This is echoed by Chuang Tsu:

If one asks about the Tao and another answers him,
neither of them knows it.¹⁹

The teachings, even to this day, are passed on from master to pupil as they have been for thousands of years. More than any other school of Eastern thought Zen is convinced that words can never express the ultimate truth:

A special transmission outside the scriptures,
Not founded upon words and letters,
Pointing directly to the human mind,
Seeing into one's nature and attaining Buddhahood.²⁰

The problem of the inadequacy of verbal transmission is an interesting one and can also be found in other areas. Albert Einstein laments the same inadequacy of the language of mathematics to describe the realities of science:

As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality,
they are not certain; and as far as they are certain,
they do not refer to reality.²¹

In the Tao of Physics this problem is addressed in the chapter entitled "Beyond Language." This book relates

¹⁸Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching New Translation by Bia-Fu Feng and Jane English, (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 1

¹⁹Capra, The Tao of Physics, p. 109.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 27.

the findings of twentieth century physics to theories of Eastern philosophies. Their similarities are astounding and for anyone interested in science or spirituality this book is very relevant. Basically, physicists are finding that contemporary discoveries in physics are consistent with theories of the universe that have been held for centuries by Eastern mystics. This is a very interesting development for the West.

In Western philosophy, logic and reasoning have always been the tools used to formulate philosophical ideas; this is true, according to Bertrand Russell, even of religious philosophies. In Eastern mysticism, on the other hand, it has always been realized that reality transcends ordinary language, and the sages of the East were not afraid to go beyond logic and common evidences.

The main reason for the inadequacy of language as we know it is that if the experiences are described (both in Zen and in modern physics) they contain contradictions that must necessarily exist simultaneously. There is no room for this in our system of logic and language. It is therefore inadequate for certain types of informational transmission. These paradoxes are characteristic of all mysticism and, since the beginning of this century, they are also characteristic of physics.

Just a few more words to describe this dilemma from the scientific point of view, with specific reference to

²²Ibid., p. 33.

the discovery and experimentation with sub-atomic particles:

This experience, however, is not an ordinary one, comparable to that of our daily environment. The knowledge about matter at this level is no longer derived from direct sensory experience, and therefore our ordinary language, which takes its images from the world of the senses, is no longer adequate to describe the observed phenomena. As we penetrate deeper and deeper into nature, we have to abandon more and more of the images and concepts of ordinary language.²³

From this point on it was impossible to rely with absolute certainty on logic and common sense. Atomic physics provided the scientist with the first glimpses of the essential nature of things and also with the first real problems of verbal transmission which has been common in the East for thousands of years. The ability to deal with experiences not transmittable through language will be dealt with in detail later but, here, let it suffice to say that the experience of enlightenment cannot be adequately explained.

However, we will attempt to gain a peripheral view of some of its characteristics. There are many characteristics and revelations that occur with enlightenment but the major one has to do with the dropping of the ego--"I"--and the subsequent results. What happens when your separate "self" disappears? What happens when the walls that stand between you and all that is not you are eliminated? What fills the vacuum? The concept is frightening in theory

²³Ibid., p. 38.

and hard to imagine. Some words that might be chosen to describe this basically indescribable experience would be "unity," "oneness," "communion," "completeness," "dropping of fear," "non-duality." These experiences are not felt in an intellectual sense but in a powerful direct feeling and understanding. It is the realization that each of us is identical in spirit, in essence, in nature with the universe and its workings. This is an overwhelming thought. This sense of oneness and unity is enlightenment. In ordinary life we are not aware of the unity of things, but divide the world into separate objects and events. Our tendency is to divide the perceived world into individual and separate things and to experience ourselves as isolated egos in this world. With the dropping of ego this dualism disappears. The intellectual distinction between subject and object fades. Though this distinction is useful and necessary in order to cope with our everyday environment, according to Eastern philosophy it is not a fundamental feature of reality. It is merely an intellectual abstraction. Enlightenment is seeing into the interrelation of all things.²⁴ This is difficult to understand for those who have been steeped in the culture of the Occident. The Oriental view of the world has always been "organic." For the Eastern mystic all things and events perceived by the senses are interrelated and are but different aspects or manifestations of the same ultimate reality. No matter

²⁴Ibid., p. 117.

how many differences in detail there may be among various schools of Eastern thought they all emphasize this basic unity of the universe.²⁵ This direct experiencing of oneness and the interrelation in the universe is at the very core of Zen.

In Philip Kapleau's books there are many letters from people of every age in every walk of life who have experienced this phenomenon. These letters make it clear that it is indeed something that can be attained.

There are experiences in everyone's life when we get a glimpse of this type of occurrence in the form of brief intuitive insights. By this I mean that there are times when the intensity of a particular experience temporarily changes our perception, our involvement with our surroundings, our sense of time and space. These experiences are difficult to explain but they generally have certain similarities. In psychology they are sometimes referred to as "direct experiences." Some qualities of an intuitive insight are:

- the boundaries between you and a particular object blur and you see it as if for the first time--there is a merging of subject and object
- there is unusual clarity of thought
- you become less aware of yourself--the ego loosens hold temporarily
- labels, categorization and biases drop
- you see things as unique yet somehow interrelated
- your sense of time or physical space changes or

²⁵Ibid., p. 10.

vanishes

- it is an inspirational experience that cannot be verbalized adequately
- desires and agitations dissolve
- you experience a sense of joy, lightness, peace²⁶

It seems to be a time when our usual critical facilities break down or just step aside for a time and an experience is fully felt. They are powerful moments. Granted, this is a far cry from the enlightenment experience but it is representative of a time when we see things a little differently and experience special insights and emotions. As we all have these insights and can possibly relate to them more easily than to the phenomenon of enlightenment, I want to take some time to examine them a little more closely.

Deep mystical experiences generally do not occur without long preparation; direct intuitive insights do. We are all familiar with the situation where we have forgotten the name of someone or something and cannot produce it despite the utmost concentration and direction of will. It seems to be so close to the surface yet we cannot retrieve it. Then, when we shift our attention to something else and "give up," it appears spontaneously. No thinking is involved at this point. It comes as a sudden insight or remembrance. This example of spontaneously remembering something is particularly relevant to Buddhism which holds

²⁶ Jonathan Wohl, "Direct Experience," Psychology of Creativity, Rochester Institute of Technology, October 24, 1977.

that our deep nature is already enlightened and that we have merely forgotten it. Hence the often quoted statement that describes looking for enlightenment as "... riding an ox in search of an ox."²⁷ Another example of an intuitive insight that we all experience is the joke. In the split second when it is understood, you experience a direct insight. It is well known that this must take place spontaneously and cannot be achieved by analysis. It is impossible to explain a joke to someone through intellectual processes and have the same effect. Only through the sudden insight into the nature of the joke are you able to experience the liberating laughter that it was meant to produce.²⁸ Dr. Capra in The Tao of Physics talks about these insights:

In our everyday life, direct intuitive insights into the nature of things are normally limited to extremely brief moments. Not so in Eastern mysticism where they are extended to long periods and, ultimately, become a constant awareness. The preparation of the mind for this awareness--for the immediate, nonconceptual awareness of reality--is the main purpose of all schools of Eastern mysticism, and of many aspects of the Eastern way of life. During the long cultural history of India, China and Japan an enormous variety of techniques, rituals and art forms have been developed to achieve this purpose, all of which may be called meditative in the widest sense of the word.²⁹

For centuries the East has been dealing with techniques to silence the analytical mind and shift the awareness and sensitivity from the rational to the intuitive mode of consciousness. The reasoning behind this is that when the

²⁷Capra, The Tao of Physics, p. 111.

²⁸Woodworth, Zen, The Turn Toward Life, p. 24.

²⁹Capra, The Tao of Physics, p. 24-25.

mind is cleared of nervous, compulsive, ceaseless thought and becomes still and concentrated, something else will make itself known and a change in perspective will occur. A word of caution: this will only occur with the combination of clear mind and concentrated mind. Quieting thoughts solely will not do it; strength of concentration is a must.

Some clarification is necessary here. First, when I speak of a clear mind, or a silenced mind or an empty mind this is not to be taken too literally. The mind is never "empty" and free of thought. When asked by students how to silence their minds, Roshi Philip Kapleau has been known to say that you cannot completely silence your mind because when you stop thinking, you're dead. This is very important. Silencing the mind means eliminating compulsive and unconstructive thoughts--not all thought.

Second, and this is where a lot of misunderstanding occurs, let us look at the mind with reference to its use of rational and logical thought. Zen by no means discredits the use of rational knowledge. It discredits only its misapplication. It is quite clear that knowledge and reason have built the world we live in and that these qualities are among man's sharpest tools with which to deal with the universe. They are the basis for progress, prosperity and culture as we know it. Buddhism always stresses appropriateness. Therefore the use of rational and logical thought is applauded when used appropriately. However, according to Buddhism this mode of thinking cannot and should not be

carried into areas where it does not apply. Hugh Woodworth states: "The truth of the matter is that thinking, so useful in some departments of life, is destructive in others, and this is difficult to see."³⁰ He speaks of the material world of things "that can be seen and touched and measured" as one stratum of experience, but with other worlds and levels of consciousness coexisting. When rational, logical thought is applied to these strata trouble arises because analytical thought has limited application. However, as it has served us so well in the area of the material field we assume it can encompass other areas. This is simply not so.³¹

How, then, can we encourage and strengthen our own spontaneous insights and get closer to this deep nature of ours which seems so illusive? How can we become more sensitive and receptive to our impulses? This world is familiar to children and as children we once lived in it and may even yet experience at times a flash of magic, of strange happiness that we suddenly remember was commonplace in childhood. This world is not dead, but can be nurtured and rediscovered with practice.³² Woodworth speaks of the obstacles in this path:

The difficulties of achieving the Zen condition are many and varied, and differ from person to person, but all have one thing in common. Each consists of some established habit of thinking or feeling, which, persisted in, makes the enlightenment utterly impossible.

³⁰Woodworth, Zen, The Turn Towards Life, p. 8.

³¹Ibid., p. 9.

³²Ibid., p. 27-28.

In other words, the necessity for anyone wishing to know Zen is not to do anything new, but simply to discontinue the old--to abandon, somehow, the assumptions, the fears, the standardized habits of thinking and feeling that make human life what it is today. The truth of the matter, which is very difficult to perceive, is that civilization itself is built of tensions, that tensions (which stem from fear) are the accepted condition of human life almost from birth to death. If the tensions and pressures of human life can be somehow removed the Zen consciousness of itself would flood in to fill the vacuum.³³

The underlining is mine. This thought of discontinuing the old patterns and dropping existing ways of thinking, as opposed to acquiring new knowledge, is an echo of Lao Tzu, who said: "He who pursues learning will increase everyday; He who pursues the Tao will decrease everyday."³⁴

Here we see that it is a reductive process--no amount of reading or theorizing will help. It is a stripping away, a giving up, a constant process of elimination for the purpose of seeing into this innermost life--the center or essence of our being. If this essence is to be directly grasped all inessentials must be eliminated and all illusions seen through.

This is not easy. It is difficult to bear in mind that this core or Mind exists and to keep this realization alive. Also, the problem of sifting out the error of daily habitual thinking and consciousness may sound simpler than it is. It is especially difficult for the well-read and educated, the highly trained, the theoretician and intellectual. They believe all that has made them what they are

³³Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴Ibid., p. 26.

is based on the intellectual thought process and their rational being. They, therefore, hesitate and fear to question and give up what they feel to be their base or foundation of being. It may seem unfair and possibly unnecessary to abandon the ultimate trust in thought and to try to break down the subject/object orientation in order to reach a higher level of awareness, but this is the case.

As this can be an end to a particular way of thinking it can also be a beginning of a new perspective.³⁵ If we agree to try to relinquish our hold on reason and logic, what else can we do to become more sensitive and receptive to our impulses? Woodworth addresses this question. He states that when nervous, compulsive and unending thinking ceases, when the mind becomes quiet, true impulses and impressions will appear and make themselves felt. This cannot be forced and receptivity is the key. An impression is a mindless experience--like the smell of a rose. It is an experience that cannot adequately be described. It is a message, a communication, the totality of which cannot be adequately expressed in words. It floods into consciousness, is experienced, and is then swept away again. To rekindle these impressions and impulses, practice is necessary. The mind must be encouraged to relax from its constant activity and attention must be directed again and again to one or another aspects of your environment. Woodworth points out that the mind cannot attend to two

³⁵Ibid., p. 25.

things at once. He states, "For example, can you think, in the same instant, of an orange and a motorcycle?" It is important to understand that if the mind is thinking and attending to a rapid sequence of associated thoughts, it cannot simultaneously be open and receptive to the faint and delicate impressions of one's environment. So, for instance, try looking mindlessly and unanalytically at something--a flower, tree, the pavement under you, the pen in your hand, or anything at all. Be attentive but without judgment.

It may be said that this attention constitutes thinking. In a way that is true, "... but it is relaxed and contemplative thinking--not the endless nervous concern of the wound-up conscious thinker." Cultivate non-judgmental direct experiences. Give yourself to them without needless intellectualization.³⁶ Woodworth cautions us that it would be naive to think that the abandonment of absolute faith in knowledge, the decrease in dualistic perception, the cessation of compulsive thinking along with the receptivity to impulse and impression will of themselves bring about enlightenment. It is not that simple. However, each of these things represents a relaxing of tension, of preconceived ideas, and brings one closer to the point where, perhaps in an unguarded moment, and probably after many years of training, "... the full change occurs, fears drop away completely, and one enters wholly a new state of

³⁶Ibid., p. 27-28.

consciousness, where existence is complete at every moment and where there is an experiential understanding and rapport with the world around us."³⁷

Once you transcend the fear of giving up control and knowledge--once you see it as an illusion, once you stop being impressed with human thought but instead see its weaknesses and accept them, a change in viewpoint will occur, a philosophical change. The mind is already tired of the continual pressure, the endless necessities, the constant worry. The only reason we persist in this behavior is that we accept it as normal and an established pattern of life. However, this is a manmade structure and mental state. It can be seen through. As Woodworth states: "This change does not bring about chaos--only release and relief, the joy of a new freedom."³⁸ When this is directly experienced, fragmentation of the psyche disappears and a unity is completely and irrefutably perceived.

Before looking into the formal aspects of training an aspirant would receive by an enlightened teacher, I would like to address several charges frequently made of Zen and see if, perhaps, we can clear up some common misunderstandings. Consider these four lines:

Empty-handed I go, and behold the spade is in my hands;
I walk on foot, and yet on the back of an ox I am riding;
When I pass over the bridge,
Lo, the water floweth not, but the bridge doth flow.³⁹

³⁷Ibid., p. 30.

³⁸Ibid., p. 15.

³⁹Suzuki, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, p. 58.

This may seem absurd and yet I am going to profess that Zen is based on practical methods and rejects abstractions. Although there are elements of the illogical on the surface, it is not in its essence illogical.

How can something be and at the same time not be? It cannot without passing the limitations of "yes" and "no". It is necessary to see that there is something beyond logic that can encompass both concepts simultaneously. The posing of seeming contradictions by Zen masters is common as will be seen in the later section of Koan training. Contradictions are not hindrances and they are not contradictions if looked upon from a new viewpoint. If you persist in thinking "A" and "not-A" and see things based on intellectual dualism and logic as we know it, then this change in perspective will be impossible. It is only when we realize, by experience, not by analysis, that "A" can be "not-A" simultaneously and without conflict, and see that the illogical is not in the last analysis illogical, that we can approach this new viewpoint.

The understanding of an experiential level of these seeming contradictions is brought about by very down-to-earth training methods and the use of day-to-day objects and references. Dr. D. T. Suzuki explains:

Zen is pre-eminently practical. It has nothing to do with abstractions or dialectics. It seizes the spade in front of you, and holding it forth, makes the bold declaration, 'I hold a spade, yet I hold it not.' No reference is made to God or to the soul; there is no talk about infinity or a life after death. This handling of a homely spade, a most ordinary thing to see

about us, opens all the secrets we encounter in life.⁴⁰

I would like to spend some time at this point with Dr. Capra, physicist and author of The Tao of Physics. His chapter entitled "Beyond the World of Opposites" is extremely relevant to our topic of understanding the coexistence and non-conflict of contradictions. What follows is a paraphrasing and encapsulation of this chapter. In Eastern thought there is a pronouncement that all things and events are manifestations of a basic oneness; this does not mean that all things are equal. The individuality of things is seen yet the awareness is there that all differences and contrasts are relative. The unity of opposites, or "A" and "not-A" is very difficult for us to accept. Keep this in mind--opposites are abstract concepts belonging to the realm of thought and as such they are relative. They are two sides of the same reality; extreme parts of a single whole. Good cannot be understood without an understanding of bad. Dark is meaningless without the experience and comparison of light. All opposites are complementary and there is always an interplay between the two extremes. A similar plane has been reached in modern physics. This was a result of the exploration of the subatomic world which revealed a reality which repeatedly transcended language and reasoning, and the unification of concepts which had always seemed opposite and irreconcilable. Examples of this unification of opposite concepts can be found at

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 62.

the subatomic level, where particles are both destructible and indestructible; where matter is both continuous and discontinuous, and force and matter are but different aspects of the same phenomenon. It turned out that the framework of opposite concepts, derived from our everyday experiences was too narrow to encompass the world of subatomic particles. Like the unity of opposites experienced by the mystics, this reality took place on a "higher plane," i.e., in a higher dimension (four dimensional space-time) and, like that experienced by mystics, is a dynamic unity because the relativistic space-time reality is an intrinsically dynamic reality where objects are also processes and all forms are dynamic patterns. It has taken physicists a long time to accept the fact that matter manifests itself in ways which seem to be mutually exclusive; for instance, to come to grips with the fact that particles are waves and waves simultaneously particles. This could not be encompassed by the theories of classical physics. Capra states that a physicist can never say that an atomic particle exists at a certain place, nor can he say that it does not exist. Being what is termed a "probability pattern," the particle has tendencies to exist in various places and thus manifests a strange kind of physical reality between existence and nonexistence. They cannot, therefore, describe the state of the particle in terms of fixed opposite concepts. The particle is not present at a definite place, nor is it absent. It does not change its position, nor does

it remain at rest. Dr. Robert Oppenheimer puts it this way:

If we ask, for instance, whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron is at rest, we must say "no"; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say "no".⁴¹

We can see the similarity here of the views of Eastern mystics and those of contemporary physicists. Both realities transcend the narrow framework of opposite concepts. In fact, there is a startling similarity between the words of Oppenheimer and those of the Upanishads:

It moves. It moves not.
It is far, and It is near.
It is within all this,
And it is outside all this.⁴²

To leave Capra and go on. From this it is clear that Zen can be seen as illogical from the standpoint of our everyday system of logic but at the same time must be looked upon as being non-contradictory in terms of its ultimate and non-relative reality. A contradiction can exist without conflict if seen with respect to a higher plane or level of consciousness. Dr. Suzuki, speaking to the illogicalness of Zen says:

It is not the object of Zen to look illogical for its own sake, but to make people know that logical consistency is not final, and that there is a certain transcendental statement that cannot be attained by mere intellectual cleverness. The intellectual groove of "yes" and "no" is quite accommodating when things run their regular course; but as soon as the ultimate

⁴¹Capra, The Tao of Physics, p. 139.

⁴²Ibid.

question of life comes up, the intellect fails to answer it satisfactorily.⁴³

A word about negations and their place in Zen. To delve into your nature and question uncompromisingly often poses a series of negations. Therefore, "not this, not that, not anything," if looked upon casually could appear as nihilism. This is not the case. The goal of Zen is to take you past the world of negations, past the logical antithesis of assertion and denial. It asks us to question deeper and deeper. What ultimately happens is not experienced as a negation but as an irrefutable affirmation. "There is something in Zen that frees us from conditions and at the same time gives us a certain firm foothold, which however, is not a foothold in a relative sense."⁴⁴

Zen teachings state that all the conditions which make enlightenment possible are already in the Mind and only need maturing to become manifest. Therefore, it is not necessary to learn anything new. The path, then, is to look at what we are and what is around us and question it and look again and question it, etc., continuously.

The most important factor in training is attitude. You must be open to questioning everything. Those who pursue this questioning in conjunction with the training that will shortly be described, and do so under the direction of a competent master, will find that the state of enlightenment is more than an illusive theory. However, it would

⁴³Suzuki, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, p. 67.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 68.

be unrealistic to expect quick results. It is necessary to devote some years of earnest effort to the practice.

A questioning mind is imperative. However, the most fundamental aspect to Zen training is zazen. Zazen is a seated meditation of a particular nature which should not be confused with the word meditation as it is usually interpreted. Dr. Tomio Hirai, a Japanese psychiatrist and author of Zen and the Mind, A Scientific Approach to Zen, has spent over twenty years studying the brain wave patterns of persons involved in zazen. His findings are the result of over a thousand sessions with Zen priests. He states:

Seated Zen meditation is an inner concentration of attention performed to train the person to deepen his thoughts The English word 'meditation' is often used in translating the Japanese zazen but it is not completely adequate because it underplays the element of training, which is of the utmost importance.⁴⁵

It is critical to understand that meditation without training bears no resemblance to seated Zen meditation. In addition to the aspect of training, this practice must be conducted persistently and often. Only such training can result in a true fusion of mind and body.⁴⁶ The inner concentration and deepening of thought that Dr. Hirai speaks of is not the same as intellectual concentration. He gives an example of the theoretical physicist, Dr. Niels Bohr, preparing his model for nuclear structure, as being in a state of extreme intellectual concentration, but Dr. Hirai states that this differs from the type of deepening of thought and emotions

⁴⁵Hirai, Zen and the Mind, p. 24.

⁴⁶Ibid.

brought about by the concentration of attention attained in zazen.⁴⁷ The aim of zazen is not withdrawal. The goal is not merely to calm you, eliminate nervous thought, act as a tranquilizer for the tensions of life. On the contrary, Zen has always advocated involvement with life in all its richness. Through the practice of zazen you may indeed find that you are calmer, more able to handle situations of life as they arise. But this is a byproduct and not the ultimate goal. Although zazen looks like a passive activity on the surface, it is in fact a very intense struggle with concentration and discipline. It can be the most difficult and active endeavor you have ever engaged in though it takes place while sitting motionlessly. It is very deceptive.

In zazen, the meditator strives for complete physical immobility but certainly not sleep. On the contrary, though he appears static, he is actually filled with abundant vitality and energy. Zazen is an inner concentration of attention performed to train the person to deepen his thoughts. It is an intense and difficult task. Roshi Kapleau speaks of zazen:

... zazen has always been regarded as fundamental to Zen discipline simply because centuries of experience have demonstrated that it is the easiest way to still the mind and bring it to one-pointedness so that it may be employed as an instrument of Self-discovery. In the long history of Zen, thousands upon thousands have attained enlightenment through zazen, while few genuine enlightenment experiences have taken place without it.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Kapleau, The Three Pillars of Zen, p. 20.

At this point there is something very important to keep in mind as we delve further into the practice of zazen. Zen firmly believes that the mind and the body are not separate and distinct. They are one and interconnected. What affects one affects the other.

The first step in training is the proper zazen posture. As described by Dr. Hirai:

To regulate the mind, it is necessary to regulate the body--the breathing and the posture. In this way it is possible to store up physical energy and unite it with mental energy.⁴⁹

He further states:

Physiology of the brain offers adequate substantiation of the idea of the unity of the mind and the body. The cerebral cortex controls consciousness; and the central autonomic nervous system controls the unconsciously regulated functions of the body, which sustain life.

Zen meditation regulates the operation of the autonomic system and relaxes tensions that affect the cerebral cortex. In this way it brings stability to the spirit and returns health to the body. In other words, by maintaining balance between the operations of the cerebral cortex and the central autonomic nervous system, it helps create a smooth, well-ordered state of mind. This is the scientific corroboration for the Zen teaching that the mind and the body are one.⁵⁰

As previously stated, the meditator strives for physical immobility but is actually filled with energy. An extremely important distinction must be made here about the aim of zazen with reference to other forms of meditation. Roshi Kapleau warns: "Remember, Buddhist zazen does not aim at rendering the mind inactive but at quieting and unifying it in the midst of activity."⁵¹

⁴⁹Hirai, Zen and the Mind, p. 36. ⁵⁰Ibid., p.37.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 35.

Zazen is intended to develop calm with action and action with calm.

Now, as to the best posture. Although there are several leg positions, and even a posture with a chair if a person is physically unable to sit cross-legged on the floor, I will describe only the basic seated position. The goal is to achieve the utmost in physical stability without tension but also without laxness. I will not go into too much detail as to the particulars as this can be found in either of Roshi Kapleau's books. Basically, you sit on a thick cushion, in a full-lotus or half-lotus posture. The spine must be erect but not tensed. There must be a sound bodily balance with the knees on the floor. The hands are brought to rest comfortably but not slack at a central point between the abdomen and legs. The hands are pointed upward, the left resting in the right and with the thumbs lightly touching. The face is turned slightly downward and the eyes remain open. The gaze is set about three feet in front and the eyes are lowered--not closed. This factor is what distinguishes zazen from other forms of meditation, what makes it unique and what brings about results as shown through Dr. Hirai's brain wave tests. After assuming a correct posture you then begin with breathing regulation. Regulation in this case means allowing shallow, quick breathing to become deep and slow. Dr. Hirai states:

When the position of the body is correct and when the breathing has been regulated, the mind enters the calm

state in which profound meditation is possible. I have performed experiments on the brain waves of meditating Zen priests that prove this to be true.

Under ordinary conditions, the human being breathes about eighteen times a minute. This frequency increases when the person engages in strenuous activity. The priest in Zen meditation, however, breathes only four or five times each minute.⁵²

The fewer the breaths each minute, the deeper and fuller they become. As meditation progresses, breathing becomes very deep; and the efficiency of the lungs in taking in oxygen and ridding the body of carbon-dioxide increases.⁵³

Zazen, therefore, is a specific form of seated meditation (the usual and critical factor being that the eyes are kept open) in combination with breath regulation. After seating yourself and adjusting the posture, followed by the regulation of the breath, the third phase follows.

This phase is the concentration of the mind. For beginners this usually means breath counting. This consists of counting the exhalations from one to ten and beginning again. It sounds simple but is extremely difficult at first. Roshi Kapleau speaks about breath counting:

The value of this particular exercise lies in the fact that all reasoning is excluded and the discriminative mind put at rest. Thus waves of thought are stilled and a gradual one-pointedness of mind achieved.⁵⁴

When a thought comes into your mind, do not cling to it. The important thing is not to encourage its continuance but likewise not to over-actively attempt to dismiss it. Do not make judgments on thoughts such as bad, good,

⁵²Ibid., p. 53. ⁵³Ibid., p. 113.

⁵⁴Kapleau, The Three Pillars of Zen, p. 32

interesting, etc. Be aware of their presence and then simply let them drop naturally. At that point begin counting from one again. Roshi Kapleau advises:

... let random thoughts arise and vanish as they will, do not dally with them and do not try to expel them, but merely concentrate all your energy on counting⁵⁵

After the student becomes adept at keeping the proper posture and gains control over the breath counting the next step often given is the technique of concentrating on the breath itself. The mind is now centered upon following or experiencing the breath and the counting is discontinued. These techniques slowly build a power of concentration that can be used to look into the mind itself and question its nature. This concentration is not limited to zazen alone. As Zen training is aimed at promoting a consistent and balanced attitude toward life and work, this concentration is stressed during all endeavors.

Concentration is not in the form of breath counting or the like as this would be inappropriate and distracting from tasks that had to be performed. This concentration is directed to every activity, no matter how slight or seemingly inconsequential. All tasks must be done with thought and completeness. The key here is absolute attention to whatever it is you are doing. As this training also aims at breaking down hierarchical thinking, tasks are not judged good, bad, below one's dignity, and the

⁵⁵Hirai, Zen and the Mind, p. 33.

like. Each endeavor is looked upon with attention and respect. The attitude with which everything is done is the important thing--the particular nature of the task is not. Therefore, what we would term menial work is done with as much care and concern as something of a high intellectual order. This attention and awareness also assists in building powers of concentration and aids in deepening thought.

As a slight digression while still on the topic of zazen, I would like to go back to Dr. Hirai. His book is filled with interesting facts with reference to the specific physiological and mental results of zazen meditation. They speak to the issue of why zazen is different from general meditative techniques in practice and result. Therefore, if you have any interest in understanding the means used to come to these conclusions and the specific findings, I can only refer you directly to his book in order to do these theories scientific justice. However, there is one particularly interesting finding I would like to mention. Dr. Hirai quotes the German psychopathologist, Dr. Karl Jaspers, who was the first person to devote attention to connections between meditation and medical knowledge. Jaspers asserted that seated Zen meditation has psychologically therapeutic significance in psychiatry in that it is a way of training to alter consciousness (and here is the critical factor) whether one is or is not a believer in Zen Buddhism. The source of this therapeutic significance

arises from the mental stability acquired as a result of the concentration of attention within the mind.⁵⁶ Jaspers showed that the condition achieved through training by the mystics, sages and philosophers of the past is in fact a psychological state of mind and not a matter of religious faith or philosophy. This is the key to the universality of meditation. Jaspers believed that zazen was universally valid because it dealt with the point of juncture between the mental and physical. Further, he felt that the experiential results of zazen were neither mystical nor intellectual. If the discipline was conducted properly and persistently a true fusion of mind and body would occur. This would bring about mental stability and harmony. Anyone, whether a believer in Zen or not, can employ the scientific aspects of the techniques and bring about changes in his awareness and a sense of body-mind equilibrium.⁵⁷ Whichever way you look at it, it is clear that from either a spiritually oriented approach or a strictly scientific angle, zazen is a powerful means to bring about significant changes in the mind and body.

Although the intellect is the tool which created psychic fragmentation and the alienation of dualism (subject and object differentiation), it is also a tool which can be used to loosen and relax the mind and prepare it for a change in consciousness. This is done through the koan system. The use of koans along with zazen is the

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 30.

foundation for all Zen training. Basically, a koan is an anecdote of an ancient master, a dialogue between master and student, or a statement or question put forward by a teacher to a student. There are many hundreds of koans, the purpose of which is all the same; to assist in pushing the aspirant's mind past the boundaries of logic and presenting him with an answer directly and experientially.

Koans do not make sense in our system of rational thought. For instance, a very well-known koan is, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Clearly there is no logical answer to this. The koan forces the student to assume a questioning and inquiring attitude and puts him in a mental dilemma. The koan is kept in the mind at all times, even if subconsciously. Suzuki states, "It is intended to be nourished in those recesses of the mind where no logical analysis can ever reach."⁵⁸

The koan puts our intellect in direct combat with itself for the purpose of exhausting our hold on logic. The objective is to arouse doubt and push rational thought to its limits so that a deeper level of questioning can begin. As one strives to come to an answer one finds it comes not from logic but from a mind of a higher order. As this transition of thought is taking place the student is met with great frustration. It is a situation where he must continually "give up"--he can come to no answer. He is faced with a wall that logic cannot go through.

⁵⁸Suzuki, An Introduction to Zen Buddhism, p. 107

Koan practice most often coincides with Sesshin participation, and it is usually during Sesshin that a koan is broken or seen into. A Sesshin is a seven day period of seclusion during which there is no speaking or eye contact and the participants do not leave the training grounds or monastery. Zazen is practiced between eleven to eighteen hours a day--and it is not uncommon for it to go around the clock. Sesshin participation requires tremendous discipline as it is so mentally and physically strenuous. Despite the difficulties, the power and energy that builds from this unbroken concentration often provides the impetus needed for seeing into the koan.

As the student questions more deeply and the answers to the koan are continually rejected, he experiences many negations. "Not this, not that, not anything." During this process, which may last years, there are interviews with the teacher who will reject all the superficial and intellectual answers. Suzuki describes the process:

You hesitate, you doubt, you are troubled and agitated, not knowing how to break through the wall which seems altogether impassable. When the climax is reached, your whole personality, your inmost will, your deepest nature, determined to bring the situation to an issue, throws itself with no thought of self or no-self, of this or that, directly and unreservedly against the iron wall of the koan. This throwing your entire being against the koan unexpectedly opens up a hitherto unknown region of the mind. Intellectually, this is the transcending of the limits of logical dualism, but at the same time it is a regeneration, the awakening of an inner sense which enables one to look into the actual working of things. For the first time the meaning of the koan becomes clear

Here lies the value of the Zen discipline, as it gives birth to the unshakable conviction that there is something indeed going on beyond mere intellection.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 109.

So we see here that a long string of seeming negations and frustrations leads to an experiential affirmation. Therefore, after the most strenuous discipline and practice and the most laborious devastation of rational understanding, the student receives an answer--at that point everything that has been said of the enlightenment experience is understood.

At this point the master will require a demonstration of understanding. A verbal explanation will not hold. Any verbalization of such a deep experience would necessarily be limiting. Therefore, as has been done for centuries, demonstrations are used for proof of deep understanding.

As Suzuki describes:

The wall of the koan once broken through and the intellectual obstruction well cleared off, you come back, so to speak, to your everyday relatively constructed consciousness. The one hand does not give out a sound until it is clapped by the other.⁶⁰

So, you come back to your everyday life, and function not quite as before, but with a new viewpoint. A new perspective has been allowed to show itself and our view of the universe and our place in it is forever altered by a deep understanding of its ultimate nature.

⁶⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER II

Creativity

Robert Henri, in The Art Spirit, describes the artistic process:

There are moments in our lives, there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual-- become clairvoyant. We reach then into reality. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom. It is in the nature of all people to have these experiences; but in our time and under the conditions of our lives, it is only a rare few who are able to continue in the experience and find expression for it. At such times there is a song going on within us, a song to which we listen. It fills us with surprise. We marvel at it. We would continue to hear it but few are capable of holding themselves in the state of listening to their own song. Intellectuality steps in and as the song within us is of the utmost sensitiveness, it retires in the presence of the cold, material intellect. It is aristocratic and will not associate itself with the commonplace-- and we fall back and become our ordinary selves. Yet we live in the memory of these songs which in moments of intellectual inadvertence have been possible to us. They are the pinnacles of our experience and it is the desire to express these intimate sensations, this song from within, which motivates the masters of all art.⁶¹

Henri states that "There are moments in our lives, there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual We reach then into reality." This suggests that there are aspects of our perception which upon occasion alter and allow us to see in a new way. He states that this is when we actually see into reality. He says that "It is in

⁶¹Henri, The Art Spirit, p. 45.

the nature of all people to have these experiences," therefore it seems to be a universal principle that we are talking about. "At such times there is a song going on within us, a song to which we listen. It fills us with surprise. We marvel at it." Clearly this indicates an appearance of something not external to us but, rather, deep within us, which somehow comes to the conscious surface. It surprises us; even though these experiences are "of ourselves" in the deepest sense, we view them with awe as we look at them in a more objective framework. Henri states: "Such are the moments of our greatest happiness. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom." The problem arises because "few are capable of holding themselves in the state of listening to their own song." When the intellect steps in, it retires. Now, very important to the thesis of artistic creation evolving from a spiritual base, Henri says: "... we live in the memory of these songs which in moments of intellectual inadvertence have been possible to us. They are the pinnacles of our experience and it is the desire to express these intimate sensations, this song from within, which motivates the masters of all art."

From this it seems that there are inspired intermissions from our daily concerns that make their appearances when our intellect steps aside. These experiences are the height of our emotional life and are initiated by aspects of our inner selves coming into consciousness. These experiences are so intense and meaningful that they leave us

with a desire to transmit the emotion to others as well as to relive it ourselves. Henri states: "If one could but recall his vision by some sort of sign. It was in this hope that the arts were intended."⁶²

Here is a pertinent quote from the poet Coleridge with reference to his observing nature:

In looking at objects of nature ... I seem to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolic language for something within me that forever and already exists, rather than observing something new. Even when the latter is the case yet still I have always an obscure feeling, as if that new phenomenon were a dim awakening of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner nature.⁶³

Another statement on creativity: David Jones, a Welsh painter, was asked by a newspaper reporter to state what impulses and attitudes had driven him to devote a lifetime to poetry and painting. The artist replied: "All my working life I have been trying to make a shape out of the very things of which I myself am made."⁶⁴

These perceptions of the creative process indicate that the artist is seeking to express inner, essential feelings. These feelings are not external to the person, but lie inside waiting to be unearthed and brought to consciousness. These essential feelings are discussed by Henri who states that each person has an "undercurrent" and if he is receptive to it, this undercurrent will make itself known. Henri speaks of a "core." In it lies our own fundamental principle or

⁶²Ibid., p. 13.

⁶³Collier, Art and the Creative Consciousness, p. 73.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 60.

essence--which is also a universal fundamental principle. Upheavals and changing conditions on the surface of our life do not really disturb this central aspect of ourselves.

The creative act speaks of a need to communicate something about this core and the nature of the reality experienced when we see into this aspect of our psyche. This reality is not our everyday reality but a far more real world of experiential knowledge which cannot be expressed by linguistics and the reasoning mind. It is the type of knowledge and experience that is difficult to explain but is the very essence of a person and often the major factor which gives meaning to existence.

We speak of the need to communicate an essential insight which comes from an unconscious region of the mind. Dr. Carl Jung formulated a theory of human psychic development called the "process of individuation." The hypothesis maintains that there is a "self" which he describes as the totality of the psyche. He states that throughout the ages men have been intuitively aware of the existence of such an inner center. By the process of individuation a person lives out his innate human psychic nature. It is a coming to terms with this "inborn germ of wholeness."⁶⁵ This inner self comes to us in the guise of impulses from the unconscious. One must sensitize oneself to these impulses and be receptive to them. This is where Jung sees man, especially Western man, as straying from the path of

⁶⁵Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 162.

psychic wholeness. Jung believed that a person could not reach psychic maturation and equilibrium if there was not a balance between conscious and unconscious forces. He saw that over-rationalization and the emphasis on the conscious were leading man farther and farther away from his inner being--the imbalance causing neurosis and psychic problems. Since this self is the psychic nucleus, the vital center of the personality from which the whole structural development of consciousness stems, it has to be recognized and dealt with in order for a person to fully mature. This is pertinent to the artist because it is from the unconscious that the creative forces flow.

There are times when the subconscious will, without warning or apparent preparation, give up its images and messages to us. It is at such times that we experience surprise at the workings of our own mind. It is unexpected and often dumbfounding. It happens in moments when we least expect it and, just as we cannot predict its appearance, we cannot prolong its duration. Lu Chi, a Chinese sage of the fourth century, described the coming and going of the creative impulse:

Such moments when Mind and Matter hold perfect communion, and wide vistas open to regions hitherto entirely barred, will come with irresistible force, and go, their departure none can hinder. Hiding, they vanish like a flash of light; Manifest, they are like sounds arising in mid-air. So acute is the mind in such instants of divine comprehension⁶⁶

⁶⁶Herbert Read, The Origins of Form, (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), p. 13.

Even though the subconscious seems to divulge its contents to us randomly there usually is some preparation or maturation which first takes place. Psychologists have noted that there is an observable set of circumstances which marks the occurrence of creative illumination. This illumination is not confined to the field of art but can be experienced in many areas. The characteristics that have been observed are as follows:

- Active immersion (concentrated focus)
- Passive receptivity (subconscious incubation)
- Illumination (insight from subconscious)
- Verification (rational discrimination and testing)⁶⁷

The first stage of active immersion is something that we are all familiar with. It is a time when we are fully involved in the conscious solving of a problem, in posing a particular question, etc., perhaps to the point of distraction. It is a time when tremendous input goes into the mind on a certain topic. This input may be in the form of active research or constant preoccupation with a certain stream of thought. Whatever way it occurs, the conscious mind is fully immersed in the matter. This stage is often perplexing, frustrating and painful. When the conscious mind has been given all the information possible or the person has reached a high level of frustration or saturation, a mental retreat follows.

The active stages of inquiry cease. This is a necessary step in the illumination process. We have all

⁶⁷Mike Samuels, M.D. and Nancy Samuels, Seeing With the Mind's Eye, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1975), p. 239-240.

experienced this. No matter how hard we try to come up with an answer there is no solution to be found. We give up. The conscious mind releases its hold on the problem and turns its attention in other directions. Even though it may appear that the mind has moved on to other things, this is not the case. The subconscious now takes up the matter. Intense questioning continues, but on a deeper level. Rilke wrote in a letter from Sweden: "I have often asked myself whether those days on which we are forced to be indolent are not just the ones we pass in profoundest activity."⁶⁸ When the conscious mind has been adequately prepared, when the task has been passed on to the subconscious and when an open and receptive state of mind exists, illumination occurs. Information from the subconscious makes itself known on a conscious level. This occurs, however, only when the conscious control is relaxed and when critical judgments and thoughts are put aside. Receptivity of mind is imperative. The illumination comes in a flash. It is usually accompanied by feelings of certainty and joy. There is a strong sensation of surprise and delight.

After the illumination there is an important step left--that of verification or conscious discrimination of the information brought from the subconscious. It is often thought that what comes from the subconscious is not

⁶⁸Wassily V. Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1947), p. 111.

answerable to the reasoning mind. This is not the case. The fact that information arises from another level of the mind does not absolve a person from the responsibility of using the conscious processes. The insights or truths experienced from illumination must be tested to see if they are valid and can apply to the situation. Details must be worked out to see if the ideas can be made manifest or can be fit in with pre-existing theory. This work proceeds on the conscious level. The information must be integrated. This stage requires effort and skill. In art, this is where mastery of technique becomes necessary for implementation. Without it the subconscious material cannot be ordered in a way that is transmittable to others. This process of conscious verification blends intense inspired feeling with a controlling intelligence.

Therefore, the steps of creative illumination go from the conscious in preparation to the subconscious in incubation and back to the conscious for verification and revision. This means that for the process of artistic creation to occur successfully, an artist must be sensitive to the conscious as well as the subconscious aspects of the self. It is the smooth interplay of ideas and images, rich in symbol and implication, that make themselves known and are then transmitted to others.

Little has been said of one important aspect of creative illumination and psychic maturation--pain--pain as a process of growth. In an investigation of the creative

process you continually come across the idea of disappointment, "giving up," paying one's dues, etc., as a prerequisite to development. Jung also sees pain as indispensable to the process of individuation. He states: "The actual process of individuation--the coming to terms with one's inner center (psychic nucleus) or SELF--generally begins with a wounding of the personality and the suffering that accompanies it."⁶⁹

The experience of pain and disappointment is not a new thought with reference to spiritual growth, psychological maturation or artistic advancement. In fact, there is a certain amount of pain required in the search for any of these. This is due to the fact that, in order to facilitate growth, aspects of the self must be encountered and confronted. Barriers and prejudices must be observed and dropped. Many preconceived ideas must be questioned and ultimately abandoned. Comfort and security usually follow the same path. In order to see and understand our inner nature, intense observation is essential as is a willingness to accept or change what we discover. It is a stripping away of defenses and illusions about ourselves and life. It is reductive in nature. This "emptying" and questioning of ourselves is often frightening, especially when it is not clear what, if anything, will fill the vacuum. All does not disappear, however, and this is a healthy and positive inquiry. It leads to a deeper

⁶⁹Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 166.

understanding of ourselves and others; it encourages empathy and compassion. In fact, the pain encountered can be seen as benevolent in nature. It is something that, at least in retrospect, we can be grateful for having experienced.

This growth through disappointment and pain ultimately strengthens and nourishes flexibility--a flexibility in how reality is viewed and experienced. It deepens the ability to see into the nature of things. It promotes a more universal understanding and sympathy. It encourages direct and multilevel insight. To quote Picasso:

Reality is more than the thing itself. I look always for the super-reality. Reality lies in how you see things. A green parrot is also a green salad and a green parrot. He who makes it only a parrot diminishes its reality. A painter who copies a tree blinds himself to the real tree. I see things otherwise. A palm tree can become a horse.⁷⁰

Paul Klee believed that art was neither a mirrored reflection of conscious reality nor unconscious reality--but the transformation of them into another reality. Thus, in addition to being able to see conscious reality and call forth unconscious reality, it was also necessary to be able to synthesize them into a transformed reality.⁷¹ This certainly requires that an artist be able to see and experience in an expanded sense. As stated earlier, art reveals profound truths about the nature of reality--not the everyday subject-object oriented world--but the far

⁷⁰Collier, Art and the Creative Consciousness, p. 4.

⁷¹Read, The Origins of Form, p. 14.

more real world of experiential knowledge. In order to sensitize ourselves to this level of reality it is necessary to have mental flexibility or the world of images and implication from other levels of our consciousness will be forever inaccessible. A rigid mind will allow no variation from the most obvious and superficial understanding.

Thus far it has been stated that an artist must find a balance between his unconscious and conscious. The artist must also be willing to experience disappointment and hope to grow from it. In addition, the flexibility of mind which will allow for multilevel seeing and understanding of reality is imperative. Given all this, however, the question arises as to where exactly the actual forms come from. Are they stimulated by external events and images or do they arise from internal sources? It differs with individual artists and can sometimes be seen in various combinations. For instance, the well-known sculptor, Henry Moore, has always been deeply moved and influenced aesthetically by natural forms. He has said: "Out of the millions of pebbles passed in walking along the shore I choose to see with excitement only those which fit in with my existing form interest at the time."⁷²

From this statement it seems he is searching for the appropriate form to express a certain sensation or sensations. The artist knows when it is the right form because

⁷²Collier, Art and the Creative Consciousness, p. 65.

it "resonates." There is an intuitive "rightness" for that specific expression. As Coleridge stated earlier, "I seem to be seeking ... a symbolic language for something within me that forever and already exists"⁷³

In contrast, Piet Mondrian, known for his serenely contemplative geometric abstractions, worked from a theory of "informed intuition." Mondrian states:

Art shows that ... intuition becomes more and more conscious and instinct more and more purified Intuition enlightens and so links up with pure thought. They together become an intelligence which is not simply of the brain, which does not calculate, but which feels and thinks. This is creative both in art and life.⁷⁴

Mondrian, over many years of meditative study on the laws of harmonious equivalence and relation was able to have his intuition act directly upon his paintings. He did not rely on seeing the appropriate form in nature or reality. He relied on "pure thought" to make manifest the appropriate form for his expression.⁷⁵

The emergence of the form from the subconscious is also typified by the Russian suprematist, Kasimir Malevich. The following passage not only speaks to the issue of the form coming from within, but also describes the pain and uncertainty surrounding the event. (This particular passage refers to his painting of an "empty square"):

The ascent to the heights of non-objective art is arduous and painful ... but it is nevertheless rewarding. The familiar recedes even further and further into the background The contours of the objective world fade more and more and so it

⁷³Ibid., p. 73.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 54.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 71.

goes, step by step, until finally the world--'everything we loved and by which we have lived' ... becomes lost to sight. No more 'likeness of reality,' no idealistic images--nothing but a desert. But this desert is filled with the spirit of non-objective sensation which pervades everything. Even I was gripped by a kind of timidity bordering on fear when it came to leaving 'the world of will and idea,' in which I had lived and worked and in the reality of which I had believed. But a blissful sense of liberating non-objectivity drew me forth into the 'desert,' where nothing is real except feeling ... and so feeling became the substance of my life. This was no empty square which I had exhibited but rather the feeling of non-objectivity.⁷⁶

Along with the work that is inspired by "pure thought" like Mondrian's and the emerging of form from the subconscious like Malevich's, there is work that is inspired from "pure feeling in action." An example of this would be the paintings of Jackson Pollock. Pollock's work exemplifies the merging of intense action on the artist's part along with the occurrence of controlling intuitive messages which takes place simultaneously. Pollock talks of his state of mind while painting:

In a state of spiritual clarity there are no secrets. The effort to achieve such a state is monumental and agonizing, and once achieved it is a harrowing state to maintain. In this state all becomes clear⁷⁷

He states that it is:

... the total engagement of the spirit in the expression of meaning His action is immediately art.⁷⁸

In a film on his work he states that he had to eradicate his first attempt at painting on glass because he "lost contact with his painting."⁷⁹ This indicates the most

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 54. ⁷⁷Ibid., p. 70. ⁷⁸Ibid., p. 71.

⁷⁹Jackson Pollock, A. F. Films, 1951.

direct and intuitive contact between the artist and his work. There is no subject-object orientation or detachment.

It seems that an artist can harbor sensations that are virtually waiting for the appropriate form or symbol with which to merge or he can work more directly from theory and intuition to create form. Naturally, artistic creation can also occur by the combination of these phenomena.

The act of creation is far too complex and subtle to always fit clearly into any specific set of circumstances. These two categories are used merely as generalizations to show that there is some predictability and analysis possible. It is impossible to state exactly where an artist's form vocabulary comes from or why a particular visual is so compelling, sometimes to the point of obsession. It is such an intricate system of symbols and personalized images that it would be limiting to try to categorize excessively. However, it is clear that when the artist is in the actual process of creating, a charged state of consciousness is present. There are probably as many names for this state as there are artists. To name a few: Michelangelo (eye of the soul), Kandinsky (secretly implanted vision), Jackson Pollock (state of spiritual clarity), Mondrian (pure thought and informed intuition) and Agnes Martin (moments of perfection).

One very important factor which should be understood: this state of highly charged consciousness underlies all

artistically creative acts--it is not solely the prerogative of the romantic or overly expressive artist but it also radiates and illumines more classical, calm, harmonious, balanced and meditative forms of visual expression.

Therefore, when looking at Mondrian's perfectly balanced paintings of geometric equilibrium, we must be aware that they are not merely design productions but issue from the depths of the unconscious and are the results of a highly emotional and expanded spectrum of awareness.⁸⁰

In fact, I would venture the hypothesis that in order to see the emotional and deeply moving aspects of the more classical, contemplative works is a sign of increased visual acuity. It is subtler and requires a more sensitive and "purified" vision. Seeing past the obvious and being able to comprehend and appreciate the more essential, delicate or minimal is a result of a reductive process. It is the result of getting past the blatant, the emotionally manipulative. It reflects the search for the inner aspects and the weeding out of needless embellishment.

Whether actively expressive or quietly contemplative, a work of art is the result of a heightened state of consciousness. It is a by-product--a sign of what has passed. It reflects the attainment of a state of increased awareness, a state of high functioning. This represents an extraordinary moment of existence. This state of being is the essential thing--not the object produced. However,

⁸⁰Collier, Art and the Creative Consciousness, p. 54.

in the state of heightened awareness the inner need to make manifest and express this event is intense. The reason is twofold: 1) the desire to record for the purpose of transmitting to others and 2) the desire on the part of the artist to be able to relive the experience by creating some symbol that will carry its powerful sensation and message. As Pollock states, "When in the state of artistic creation there are no secrets."⁸¹ This revelation comes as a sudden grip on the fundamentals of nature, the spirit of life, the constructive forces in the universe. It is the real understanding, if even for a short time, of the relative importance and interrelation of things. It is the experiencing of order and balance on a grand scale. This state of awareness is spiritual in nature and is generally accompanied by feelings of gratitude and joy. The desire to transmit this to others is healthy and compassionate and the desire to relive it is understandable.

The goal of life is not to make art, but to experience and communicate the elevating level of consciousness present in moments of artistic creation. The goal is to live on the highest level of consciousness possible--art will result from this. The actual work of art, through whatever medium it becomes manifest, is merely a footprint of a mental state that existed for a time in a particular person. Art, therefore, does not come from outside your existence, but is the manifestation of your living, not living in the usual,

⁸¹Ibid., p. 70.

everyday sense, but living with an intensity and awareness that for a time allows deeper understanding of ourselves and the universe.

Now we come to a paradox. All along it has been stressed that in order to create it is necessary to question deeper and deeper. It is necessary to become sensitive to our inner life and inclinations. It is imperative to balance our subconscious and conscious and perceive in an expanded way. It is a search that is at times painful and frustrating and must be done alone. No one can teach these things. They must be learned by the individual. This learning comes through experience and patience. It is a highly personal endeavor. Yet, what we find is that for a work of art to be considered great and have lasting significance it must be universal in nature. It must transcend the personal and speak to our common humanity. Jung states:

The essence of a work of art is not to be found in the personal idiosyncrasies that creep into it--indeed, the more there are of them, the less it is a work of art--but in the rising above the personal and speaking from the mind and heart of mankind. The personal aspect of art is a limitation and even a vice. Art that is only personal, or predominantly so, truly deserves to be treated as a neurosis.⁸²

Where, then, does this transition from the personal to the universal occur? How can the act of artistic creation be so highly personal yet arrive at universality? The

⁸²C. G. Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature 15, (New York: Bollinger Foundation, 1966), p. 101.

transition occurs when the artist reaches the limits of the superficial. The artist must rise above the shallow, ego-centered aspects of personality and reach into the broader aspects of mankind--by which we all are connected. Only after the superficial is exhausted and eliminated can the meaningful emerge. The deeply personal transforms itself into the universal--with discipline and patience.

A note of importance here. Although suffering, questioning and heightened sensitivity are key elements that must be experienced in order for the personal to become universal, it is critical to note that this must be experienced on a deep, soul-searching level and should not be confused with states of neurosis. Deep contemplation and questioning result in a stabilization of the personality whereas erratic, destructive or hyper-active neurotic states lead to fragmentation of the psyche and an inability to experience the universal aspects of the creative act. Even though there is a sense of excitement experienced in the act of artistic creativity, it is healthy and constructive in nature. Aggitation, aggression, ego-centeredness and the like do not foster creativity, but inhibit it. This is important as neurotic behavior often attempts to use the guise of "creative personalities." This is misrepresentation. In order to understand and transmit truly universal aspects of truth or beauty, it is necessary to transcend ourselves in the shallow subjective sense and see into our common essence. Only then can art surpass the self-conscious and overly

self-aware.

Personal and universal are not mutually exclusive. When the personal is experienced deeply enough it becomes the universal. Great art, founded in deep personal searching, speaks to all. It addresses our common psychic heritage. As Okakura states: "The masterpiece is of ourselves, as we are of the masterpiece."⁸³

If a work of art is somehow "of ourselves" and we want to be able to decipher its message, is there a way that will increase our understanding? I will go to the well-known Japanese writer, Kakuzo Okakura, for advice on how to view art. In my opinion it seems to be more appropriate to the spirit and meaning of art. He states: "The spectator must cultivate the proper attitude for receiving the message, as the artist must know how to impart it." That is to say, just as the artist must open himself to his subconscious, become sensitive to inclination and receptive in spirit, the viewer must do the same. Okakura states: "In order to understand a masterpiece, you must lay yourself low before it and await with bated breath its least utterance." There is a reverence and receptivity in this advice little known in the West. Currently, there is a tendency to confront the work of art and break it down into definable aspects which can then be categorized and judged. It is almost an aggressive act--ego-centered and arrogant. A theory is formulated--but the spirit lost.

⁸³Kakuzo Okakura, The Book of Tea, (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), p. 44.

Okakura is more interested in:

... rather the soul than the hand, the man than the technique ... the more human the call the deeper is our response.⁸⁴

Memories long forgotten all come back to us with a new significance At the magic touch of the beautiful the secret chords of our being are awakened, we vibrate and thrill in response to its call. Mind speaks to mind.⁸⁵

Without this element of humility and receptivity we can never hope to receive what the artist wished to impart. We must be flexible and vulnerable enough to be influenced and taken into the work. If, however, we take a critical stance from the onset, all we see will be a reflection of our own subjective projections--nothing new will be experienced. This is certainly not to say that one must give up one's critical facilities. Naturally, there is a place for them. But before a work of art is analyzed and judged in detail for formal aesthetics and technical properties the viewer should submit to the experience of viewing.

Okakura describes the reactions of an art lover viewing art:

At the moment of meeting, the art lover transcends himself. At once he is and is not. He catches a glimpse of Infinity, but words cannot voice his delight, for the eye has no tongue. Freed from the fetters of matter his spirit moves in the rhythm of things. It is thus that art becomes akin to religion and ennobles mankind.⁸⁶

There are a few thoughts in Okakura's statement which I would like to emphasize: "... the art lover transcends himself but words cannot voice his delight, for the eye has no tongue his spirit moves in the rhythm of

⁸⁴Ibid. ⁸⁵Ibid., p. 43. ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 45.

things. It is thus that art becomes akin to religion." Aside from the artist's transcendence of self in the act of artistic creation there is also a similar phenomenon on the part of the receptive viewer. "He catches a glimpse of Infinity" In the process of viewing he sees deeper into the nature of things and into himself. "... his spirit moves in the rhythm of things." Kandinsky has stated that "Work is a material expression or manifestation of the spiritual--the soul."⁸⁷ Therefore, when we experience a work of art profoundly and deeply it awakens in us emotions too fine to be expressed verbally--"... words cannot express his delight, for the eye has no tongue." If pressed, it is possible to find verbal expression, but never will it be adequate. Words fail to express the total meaning. Verbal descriptions narrow and limit the richness of the experiential aspects. That which is left unsaid will be the very essence or core of the experience--which is the most meaningful. Words, therefore, are merely a hint, a suggestion.

Sympathetic to Okakura's suggestions on viewing art is a statement by Eugene Schwartz, a collector of contemporary and avant-garde art. It is reassuring to see that the same sensitive descriptions and guidelines stated decades earlier by Okakura have not been altogether discarded in our own culture. Mr. Schwartz speaks of how to view highly abstract, contemporary art, which for most people is an unnerving and difficult task. I also see his statement as an appropriate

⁸⁷Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, p. 63.

finale to these concerns on creativity. He states:

First, you must realize that they are only called 'paintings' or 'sculpture.' These titles make them seem to be physical objects, which they are not; no more than a human being is nothing more than his physical body. What they really are, of course, are experiences. They are in some very real way, alive. If they remain only color and form for you, therefore, you have missed them. You must go beyond the physicality of them to the intelligence and emotion and vision of the man who created them. It is only when you feel these 'invisible' elements--which are as much there as the canvas and the paint--that you have really 'seen' them. This takes time and, above all, openness. If you come to these works with your own idea of what 'art' is, then you will not see what this art is at all. You are here to expand your vision, by borrowing the vision of other men who see more deeply and vividly into this area of the human condition than you. And lastly, don't try to put the feelings or visions or the experiences you get from these paintings into words. This art, years ago, went beyond words. There are no symbols here; no metaphors; no icons; no representations. The ... art ... explores that area of reality which is not communicable in language--as does music, and nuclear physics You cannot, therefore, talk about these works. You can only come back to them, and experience them again and again.⁸⁸

⁸⁸Mr. and Mrs. Eugene M. Schwartz, Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene M. Schwartz, (University Art Gallery, State University of New York at Albany, 1969), Introduction.

CHAPTER III

Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957)

There are many volumes written on the work of the Rumanian sculptor, Constantin Brancusi. He is known for a lifetime of work dedicated to subtle simplicity of volume and purity of line. The physical manifestation of his work could be described as bare and compact. The volumes are gentle, still, composed, possessed of a highly sensitive textural rendering and clarity of form. They radiate a quiet equilibrium. They are examples of classic restraint created to elevate rather than excite the senses. His work is said to express "noble simplicity and calm grandeur."⁸⁹

In all the books on his work there can be found page after page of description, interpretation, analysis--all dealing with the formal aesthetic characteristics of his sculpture. However, nothing deals with the question of why his creative forces sought that particular form, why they became manifest in one way and not another.

In each of the volumes there is usually one sentence, or sometimes just a footnote, stating something like this: Brancusi's life was based on the teachings of Milarepa, a

⁸⁹Carola Giedion-Welcker, Constantin Brancusi, (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1959), p. 25.

thirteenth century Tibetan monk. Then the book goes on to other things. This is unfortunate as it is here we find the most fundamental insights into the man and his work which no amount of formal aesthetic analysis will unveil. Thus, Brancusi's deepest philosophy and concerns are left undisclosed.

There is one bright spot--one volume produced by an art historian, friend and biographer of Brancusi named Carolyn Giedion-Welcher. She was able to set down, in Brancusi's own words, the spiritual beliefs he held that lasted his lifetime and were the foundation of all his aesthetic and artistic endeavors. This book shows his life to be an exemplary merging of spiritual concerns and artistic creation.

Brancusi was brought up in the countryside of Rumania as a peasant. His life was based on simplicity, closeness to the land and respect for nature. He possessed a stout peasant soul and developed deep, earthy wisdom. He had a strong character and did not need the acclaim of others. His life by our standards would be considered ascetic. However, he felt that this manner of life was the most suitable for bringing a man into harmony with the rhythm of nature and a man's own measure and place in it. His early life had much hardship, disappointment and despair. Even though he did not complain about these circumstances he did state: "These were times of frightful want through which I should not like to pass again."⁹⁰ Even

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 197.

though he later moved to Paris to study and work he never lost the fervor or perspective of his early peasant life.

It was not by chance that the confessions, dreams, passions and visions of the Tibetan monk, Milarepa, became a bible for Brancusi. Here he found confirmation of his own aspirations, already determined and developed from within himself. He was not looking for a new formula but rather found a similar, sympathetic spiritual climate that bridged the hundreds of years between the men.⁹¹ Here was a philosophy that was close to his peasant beliefs. Brancusi, like Milarepa, knew that there were marvelous things to be discovered in the very grime of daily existence, things that grew out of life itself, provided one could see them. Throughout Brancusi's life the most unusual things were always achieved in connection with quite ordinary circumstances. From early childhood this is how he learned--directly from everyday life--with no need for sophisticated and highly refined metaphysics. Instead, he loved and observed animals. They held great lessons for him. Brancusi held dumb creatures in high regard because "... they are unified creatures, unburdened by intellect, completely one with their rhythm of life and their beauty, without having experienced the duality, the 'disorder' that consciousness produces in the natural grace of man."⁹²

His life was marked by simplicity and isolation. Simplicity because it permitted him to progress towards

⁹¹Ibid., p. 17. ⁹²Ibid., p. 29.

"essential things," and isolation for the sake of concentration and not being distracted by irrelevant, outside matters. This isolation was not arrogant and ego-centered; it did not represent a lack of response to the present but rather a manner of viewing the transient as compared to the eternal.⁹³ This combination of simplicity and isolation allowed for an intense singleness of purpose--that of merging his spiritual concerns with his art form.

He lived alone all his life. His concerns with the eternal and universal also dictated the decision that family life was not for him. All dramatization, all impassioned exaggeration seemed to him to be illusory and dangerous. In it he saw interest in the world view destroyed and a takeover by proliferating subjectivity which he felt rendered high-minded detachment and universal concerns impossible. Passionate love seemed to him an artificially intensified form of life. Love that attached itself to one person was seen as an error, an emotion that, having been originally oriented towards the whole, had become reduced to the individual case. As with isolation, this decision was not arrogant or ego-centered, but rather made with compassion toward a broader scheme.

Brancusi's major belief could be summed up as this: All that lives is part of a universal event. Everything has its own measure ... an ultimate truth. When you get past the ego-centered detachment of "I" and "not I" you

⁹³Ibid., p. 19.

become one with all existing.

Underneath all the disquieting elements of the infinitely varied visible world there lay, for him, in each living thing, in each existence a final essential truth which had to be carefully and intuitively sought and brought to light by the artist.⁹⁴ Brancusi believed that the best medicine for the sadness of human solitude was the feeling of universal communion and that art could awaken the mysterious ties which bind the manifestations of life in ultimate truth.⁹⁵ His goal was to shake off the yoke of personal experience, reactions and prejudices in order to transcend the ego separation and be able to experience the universal. Brancusi believed that as long as objects were merely an antithesis to your "I," you could never grasp their real essence, their ultimate truth. This duality in thinking had separated man from his surroundings and it was Brancusi's wish to reconcile man with nature through his art. Brancusi felt that in order to experience the ultimate truth of existence you had to remain "undisturbedly receptive" to the great universality and not become rigidly shut in the endless problems of the ego.⁹⁶ He was very receptive to his own inner nature. He believed in the action of irrational but significantly interwoven forces* and was constantly receptive to secret signs and

*For more information on this phenomenon, see Synchronicity by Dr. Carl Jung.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 21. ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 66. ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 203.

revelations that resulted from his contacts with both man and nature. These "epiphanies," as he called them, were frequent and although they revolved around seemingly unimportant events they ultimately disclosed miraculous events in his life.⁹⁷

Brancusi felt that art revealed profound truths about the nature of reality and experience. He stated: "It is not the outward form which is real, it is the essence of things."⁹⁸ To see the true reality one needs expanded vision and sensitivity.

Brancusi was sensitive to the interrelationships of opposites. "God and the devil are not separate in things, they are neither here nor there, they are everywhere and simultaneously." In order to transmit this he was always concerned about expressing the incommunicable, blending contradictory elements into a harmonious whole.⁹⁹

Brancusi's sculpture was made through a reductive process. The material was carved or cut until it reached the point of reduction which symbolized the perfect and essential qualities of the subject. They became symbols for themselves. It is because a symbol always represents more than the sum of its parts that Brancusi's sculpture had such power. These strong, contemplative forms with their minimal characteristics held great presence and were able to radiate a harmonious and spiritual atmosphere.

This simplification through the reductive process

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 28. ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 35. ⁹⁹Ibid., p. 196.

was not a goal in itself. Brancusi believed that one arrived at simplicity, in spite of oneself, when one approached the real meaning of things.¹⁰⁰ It was through this search for the hidden principle that simplicity evolved: "Simplicity is at bottom complexity, and one must be weaned on its essence to understand its significance."¹⁰¹ In order to express on this level, Brancusi identified with the object he wanted to represent. In order to communicate the essence of something and transmit its sensations he found it necessary to participate in these sensations. This power of identification is very much a part of his peasant background. Like primitive man, the peasant ascribes an objective existence to things; he feels that they live, grow, die and have their own complete and specific destiny. Brancusi stated: "There is a goal in all things: in order to reach it, one must break away from oneself."¹⁰² This attitude is quite different from that of the sophisticated and intellectually cultured person who reduces the world to his own image and understanding. This participation did not stop at the mental penetration and communion. His singleness of purpose carried over to his use of tools and materials. He carried out all aspects of the work with the same presence of mind and comprehensive awareness. Just as he maintained familiarity with his tools by constant and careful handling, he also sought to keep direct converse with the material he was using. He wanted

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 41. ¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 58. ¹⁰²Ibid., p. 64.

to be constantly aware of every fiber of the wood, every vein in the marble.¹⁰³ He worked tirelessly in hours of hard manual labor. The actual work took place in a spirit of complete relaxation. He handled the hammer effortlessly. This phenomenon is similar to the intuitive and relaxed manner of releasing an arrow as found in Zen philosophy. The accuracy of aim and technical mastery are derived from the relaxation achieved naturally through exercises practiced in a certain spiritual attitude. The person releasing the arrow, the arrow, the bow and the act of releasing become one and effortless. In this case the artist's inner state and the process of form creation become undivided. This is the result of years of spiritual and technical preparation.¹⁰⁴

This preparation is not easy. Brancusi often said, "It isn't hard to do things! The difficulty lies in getting into the mood to do them."¹⁰⁵ He dealt with only a dozen or so themes in his life's work. He continually redefined these themes, reaching deeper into the essence and reality of his subjects. This degree of concentration is evident in his treatment of the bird sculptures. For thirty years, as though possessed, indefatigably and often in despair, he worked on many variations of this subject. To Brancusi the bird represented an act of liberation in a mystical sense. It symbolized the uplifting of the spirit. His goal was to achieve a fusion of the creature's natural intrinsic rhythm,

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 24. ¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 17. ¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 219

the specific elements of its physical existence and movements, and the symbolic expression and significance of the imponderability of flight. Breaking down the characteristics and external reality of a bird do not translate into an individual's interpretation of a bird but rather express the spirit and truth of every bird in the world since the beginning of time. Therefore, his bird is not a specific species, but the universal bird essence.

Brancusi's thoughts and feelings, as well as his artistic outlook, were determined by his faith in an "eternal return" of both the human and natural fundamental phenomena. He believed that his sculpture, once completed, attained "participation" in the archaic sense of the word. He felt that not only did they enter into a higher aesthetic form, but also into a higher cosmic totality, participating in the terrestrial-supraterrestrial cycle to which, for him, both macro and microcosmos were entirely subjugated. Thus all creation became the expression of universal events which could only be conveyed through symbolic language.¹⁰⁶

Brancusi's convictions and attitudes were deeply rooted in Eastern thought and tended to open a path to the absolute. Brancusi was a man who seemed to have been endowed with intuitive forces and was striving to attain oneness with all things. He was imbued with the spirit of the "void"--void not in the sense of nothingness but in the Eastern sense of ultimate essence. This void signifies a simplicity

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 39.

that bears within itself abundance and complexity. It also embodies form and emptiness simultaneously and without conflict.¹⁰⁷

Brancusi wanted the elements of the individual, of the vain ego, to be dissolved in order that they might reappear in a more comprehensive synthesis of the universal. His superior consciousness and spiritual clarity lent radiance to his plastic form. The incarnations in stone and bronze that grew from this inner attitude were therefore able to procure for the viewer the liberation and detachment from physical weight (Brancusi called it "deliverance") with which oriental religious philosophy is infused.¹⁰⁸ Brancusi's art was made manifest from the basis of the purest origins of art, deep in universal awareness and close to religion. His long years of patient work on a piece resulted in his impregnating it with his own spiritual radiations. These sculptures are marks of meditation, plastic guides to an atmosphere of inner concentration from which one can learn and be uplifted. Brancusi stated, "I am giving you pure joy. Look at them until you see them. Those nearest to God have seen them."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 193. ¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 17. ¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 35.

Agnes Martin (1912-)

Despite the importance of Agnes Martin in the world of contemporary art, there is little written material to be found on her. This is of her own choosing. For close to twenty years critics have spoken of her in hushed and reverential tones. To some, she has become a saint. "Her art has the quality of a religious utterance, almost a form of prayer," wrote a New York critic. There are many writers intent on inventing a dialectic that would accurately reveal the content and meaning of her contemplative grid paintings. They have proven difficult to define--they have been called minimal, classical, romantic, simple, complex and many other things, depending upon who is viewing them. However, no matter how the work is classified, it is without question that her devotees consider her a visionary.¹¹⁰

To devote oneself unremittingly to the painting of grid patterns is in itself an interesting phenomenon. On the surface a grid strongly announces modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse. A grid lowers the barrier between the arts of vision and those of language. It blocks the intrusion of speech and plays on our sensitivity of pure relationships.

¹¹⁰John Gruen, "Everything, everything is about feeling ... feeling and recognition," Art News, September 1976, p. 91.

Many view this as a cold, detached, materialistic approach to art. This is not so. Artists who have spent their lives dealing with this format and concept are not found discussing canvas, pigment, graphite or any other formal, technical matters; they are instead directing themselves toward metaphysical matters of mind and spirit. From their point of view the grid is a "staircase to the Universal," and must be viewed with expanded vision and awareness.¹¹¹

Given the rift that opened between the sacred and the secular within modern art, the artist was faced with the necessity of choosing one or the other. The grid represented a decision in favor of both. The power of the grid is that it allows us to think we are dealing with materialism, science and logic while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief and illusion. It is stridently modern to look at yet it can express and evoke emotions close to religious in nature. The grid often represents a secular form of belief.¹¹²

Through her work in grids Agnes Martin has devoted her life to the endeavor of communicating "moments of perfection."¹¹³ These "moments" represent the basic foundation and inspiration both for her life as well as her work. She

¹¹¹Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," October 9 (Summer, 1979): 51, 52.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 54.

¹¹³Agnes Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life," (Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1973), p. 1.

has defined these moments of perfection as momentary awarenesses of perfection and wholeness--free from duality and separation. These moments represent communion with the universe and add meaning and understanding to existence. They are moments in which there is pure joy in living. To some, they are very conscious and of long duration while to others they are vague and transitory and can be described best as existing below the level of consciousness. Either way, they are an incentive for life.

Agnes Martin states that these moments transcend verbal account. Even though they are basically indescribable, there are some characteristics which typify the experience. At such times one seems to wonder why life ever seemed so troublesome. There is a feeling of happiness and contentment. In an instant one can see the road ahead free from difficulties. All this and a great deal more--in barely a moment--and then it is gone. All such experiences, however, are stored in the mind. A stockpile of these moments provide an awareness of perfection and this awareness makes all the difference in what one does and how one sees things.¹¹⁴ Agnes Martin believes that everyone possesses the same inner life and that these moments of perfection are the psychic birthright of each person. The only difference lies in a person's ability to recognize these experiences and the depths to which they are experienced.¹¹⁵

Agnes Martin's most deeply held certitude is that in

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 2. ¹¹⁵Gruen, Art News, p. 94.

order to experience moments of perfection one must defeat pride. She stresses the necessity of a free mind, an open mind. She speaks of the discipline needed to eliminate pride:

Absolute freedom is possible. We gradually give up things that disturb us and cover our mind. And with each relinquishment, we feel better. You think it would be easy to discover what is blinding you, but it isn't so easy. It's pride and fear that cover the mind. Pride blinds you. It destroys everything on the way in. Pride is completely destructive. It never leaves anything untouched. First it takes one way ... telling you that you're alright ... boosting up your ego, making all kinds of excuses for you. Pride can attack your neighbors and destroy them. But sometimes, pride turns, and destroys you. It takes a long time for us to turn against pride and get rid of it entirely. And, of course, with every little downfall of pride, we feel a tremendous step up in freedom and joy. Of course, most people don't really have to come to grips with pride and fear. But artists do, because as soon as they're alone and solitary, they feel fear. Most people don't believe they have pride and fear because they've been conditioned on pride and fear. But all of us have it. If we don't think we have it, then that's a deceit of pride. Pride practices all kinds of deceptions. It's very, very tricky. To recognize and overcome fear and pride, in order to have freedom of mind, is a long process.¹¹⁶

She feels that the best opportunity to witness the defeat of pride is in an artist's work, in all the time of work and in the work itself. The most direct method for this defeat of pride is disappointment. Maintaining discipline through failure and disappointment is a directive which she pronounces again and again:

Art work is so very hard because it is a working through disappointments to greater disappointment and a growing recognition of failure to the point of defeat.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 92.

I want to emphasize the fact that increase in disappointment does not mean going backward in the work. There is no such thing as going backward in anything. There is increased and decreased awareness that is all and increased awareness means increased disappointments.

What does it mean to be defeated. It means that we cannot go on. We cannot make another move. Everything that we thought we could do we have done without result. We even give up all hope of getting the work and perhaps even the desire to have it. But we still go on without hope or desire or dreams or anything. Just going on with almost no memory of having done anything.

Then it is not us.
Then it is not I.
Then it is not conditioned response
Then there is some hope of a hint of perfection

Without hope there is hope
And without desire there is hope.

We do not ever stop because there is no way to stop. No matter what you do you will not escape. There is no way out. You may as well go ahead with as little resistance as possible ...

Going on without resistance or notions is called discipline. Going on when hope and desire have been left behind is discipline. Going on in an impersonal way without personal considerations is called discipline. Not thinking, planning, scheming, is a discipline. Not caring or striving is a discipline.¹¹⁷

She clearly sees the value in the ability to suffer in order to gain freedom. However, she does not believe in needless suffering:

suffering is necessary for freedom from suffering¹¹⁸

sought out suffering is a mistake, but what comes to you free is enlightening¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life," p. 1.

¹¹⁸Agnes Martin, The Untroubled Mind, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, January 22 - March 1, 1973), p. 20.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 17.

The path she suggests for defeating pride and gaining freedom is not an easy one. She stresses that through discipline and tremendous disappointment and failure an artist arrives at what he or she must do.

It has been said that her own paintings are made possible by a self dedicated with complete devotion to intuition. It is through this intuition that inspiration makes itself known. "I depend on the muses, Muses come and help me now."¹²⁰ Agnes Martin addresses the characteristics of inspiration and its universal quality:

That which takes us by surprise--moments of happiness--that is inspiration. Inspiration which is different from daily care. Many people as adults are so startled by inspiration which is different from daily care that they think they are unique in having had it. Nothing could be further from the truth. Inspiration is there all the time for everyone whose mind is not clouded over with thoughts. Most people have no realization whatever of the moments in which they are inspired. Inspiration is pervasive but not a power. It's a peaceful thing. Do not think that it is unique. If it were unique no one would be able to respond to your work. Do not think it is reserved for a few or anything like that. It is an untroubled mind. Of course we know that an untroubled mind cannot last so we say that inspiration comes and goes but really it is there all the time waiting for us to be untroubled again.¹²¹

In order not to deflect the power of pure impulse and intuition it is necessary to actively and consciously give up distractions which weaken them. Concentration is the key. Agnes Martin lives in such a way. It is described by Ann Wilson:

Agnes Martin creates an environment appropriate to receive the gift of inspiration. Knowing this, she lives with utmost respect. The size of her abode is

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 19. ¹²¹Ibid., p. 24.

adequate for one person. It is made of earth and roofed with the trees. Within is no more than is necessary, a table, four stools, a rocking chair, a couch, a wood stove, a water pump. Outside is the garden. Outside the door hangs a bell. That is all. The mesa around goes on for miles.¹²²

Ann Wilson goes on to describe Agnes Martin's paintings as "maps of the proportions of a state of equilibrium. A person living in equilibrium, attempting to go through each day in proportion" ¹²³ Equilibrium is a good description of her paintings. They are still and quieting. They evoke calmness and restore our psychic equanimity. They have been likened to the articulation of a plumb line. They re-establish our natural sense of balance. These paintings are geometric systems of ideal alignment. The self, when viewing them, has a visual tuning fork with which to attempt perfect pitch.¹²⁴

A last bit of advice for the artist from Agnes Martin:

Say to yourselves, I am going to work in order to see myself and free myself. While working and in the work I must be on the alert to see myself. When I see myself in the work I will know that that is the work I am supposed to do. I will not have much time for other people's problems, I will have to be by myself almost all the time and it will be a quiet life.¹²⁵

Agnes Martin's unassuming grid paintings stand quietly by themselves. These paintings are for the unconscious mind. It is a replenishing experience to view these works and

¹²²Ann Wilson, "The Essential Form: The Committed Life," Art International, December 1974, p. 51.

¹²³Ibid., p. 52. ¹²⁴Ibid., p.51.

¹²⁵Martin, "On the Perfection Underlying Life," p. 6.

allow them to take their meditative effect. She suggests that the way to look at her paintings is similar to looking at the ocean. You just go there and sit and look.¹²⁶

¹²⁶Wilson, Art International, p. 52.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

The traceable resemblances between Beethoven and his family are slight. His father had some musical talents but was a rather weak personality, a gradually deteriorating type, and a headstrong drunkard. He required unremitting industry from Beethoven and secured this by threat and punishment. There were times when the young Beethoven was dragged from bed late at night after his father returned from the local inn and was forced to practice.

Beethoven held a position in music by the age of twelve. This was due in part to exploitation by his father who, inspired by the dazzling career of the young Mozart, endeavored to promote his son as an infant prodigy. He went so far as to falsify the child's age so as to make him seem younger than he actually was. This exploitation met with some success, but never to the degree the father desired. Outside of music, the father cared nothing for the boy's education. Beethoven attended a lower grade public school for a short time and was generally dirty and uncared for. Little of Beethoven's mother is known other than that she was supposedly a pious, gentle and amiable peasant. She was what could be referred to as a quiet, suffering type. Beethoven loved his mother tremendously and seemed to have

a deep compassion for her suffering. They were very close and Beethoven felt a deep loss at her death. He was sixteen years old when she died of consumption. At the time of his mother's death the family was in dire poverty. Beethoven, nevertheless, devoted himself to the intensive study of music. By the time he was in his early twenties his musical development had become considerable. His personality was also set and mature, no doubt a result of the difficult early years of poverty, suffering and premature family responsibility. The solidity of his personal characteristics were not such as to make him socially acceptable. He possessed a lack of malleability and a strong impenetrability. These qualities made him immune to external influences. He was impervious to criticism, his manners were atrocious, he ignored social conventions and was subject to no social passions. Although some of these characteristics have a positive side in a creative personality, like all else they can be carried to an extreme. The low standard of education he achieved now seems to have been as much due to his lack of plasticity as to his lack of opportunities. He accepted none of the schemes of thought or conduct current in his time and it is doubtful if he even knew they existed. He remained utterly faithful to his own experiences and it is because of this that his utterances had such weight; they sprang solely from his own personally tested experiences.¹²⁷

¹²⁷J. W. N. Sullivan, Beethoven--His Spiritual Development, (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 44.

This lack of flexibility in his character did not mean that he was unfeeling or immune to things around him. On the contrary, he was very sensitive and reacted with deep emotion to beauty. He was romantic and idealistic but remained firmly impervious to the manipulation of social interaction. Beethoven is described as "the musician who felt, thought and dreamt in tones." He was completely musically oriented and he felt language was useless or, at best, clumsy. Never during his life did he feel at ease with it or come to believe it was adequate to communicate feeling.¹²⁸

Beethoven, therefore, had many characteristics helpful to writing great music: he was a musical genius at base, his personality was firm and directed, he thought and expressed himself solely in musical terms and was impervious to the whims of social influences. Goethe said of Beethoven, "... he has the guiding light of his genius, which frequently illumines his mind like a stroke of lightning while we sit in darkness and scarcely suspect the direction from which daylight will break upon us."¹²⁹ Goethe also stated, "His talent amazed me; unfortunately he is an utterly untamed personality, not altogether in the wrong in holding the world to be detestable, but who does not make it any the more enjoyable either for himself or for others by his attitude." He qualified that, however, by saying, "A more self-contained, energetic, sincere artist I never saw."¹³⁰

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 81. ¹²⁹Ibid., p. 6. ¹³⁰Ibid., p. 66.

What I want to deal with here is not a tracking of his great musical works, although they will be used to reference his life's progression. My interest is specifically in what appear to be the three major phases of his life's philosophy which, in his later years, became deeply spiritual--not in a conventional religious sense, but in a deeply understood, universal way. The human consciousness is a developing thing which, in addition to being nourished by experience, must have its own inner principle of growth. Marked increases in consciousness during a lifetime are not experienced by most people. It is impossible to suggest that, in general, there are "spiritual appetites" just as there are bodily ones, that make their appearance at certain stages of life, although for some this seems to be true. The fact remains, however, that comparatively few people manifest a true spiritual growth in their lifetime. A person's attitude is usually relatively fixed and although it may become more rich and subtle as one matures, it does not develop to the degree of Beethoven's. In his life we are able to trace these changes, as they were dramatic and represented clear changes in attitude. An artist possessing this heightened level of consciousness can achieve a relative level of immortality through his work as the experiences he deals with are as fundamental and universal as hunger and procreation. This does not mean that the experiences he communicates are elementary. They may be basic in their ultimate foundation

but they also contain supreme subtleties and intricacies of experience. The messages imparted are often prophetic. This is the realm to which Beethoven's music belongs.

In his twenties, Beethoven stated the following in a letter: "Power is the morality of men who stand out from the rest, and it is also mine."¹³¹ This philosophy of the morality of power is one that stayed with him during his twenties and represents the first stage of his life's philosophy. His great success, his open contempt for others, his strong personality, all made this outlook thoroughly congenial to him. He only tempered this contempt for others for the purpose of manipulation. "Never show to men the contempt they deserve, one never knows to what use one may want to put them."¹³² He described people as "... mere instruments on which when it pleases me, I play; but they can never become noble witnesses of my inner and outer reality, nor be in true sympathy with me. I value them according as they are useful to me."¹³³ As Beethoven progressed through his twenties, his personality only strengthened. He showed himself fearless in public contests with other pianists--and his victories were to him only what he expected. Beethoven's successes strengthened his conviction that his own inner force was equal to any demands that might be made upon him. He was socially gregarious and denied himself nothing. He gave vent to every impulse and cheerfully made enemies among his rivals while taking no pains to humor his

¹³¹Ibid., p. 62. ¹³²Ibid., p. 65. ¹³³Ibid.

patrons. It was as if, despite the glimpses of life's dark side which he experienced in his childhood, he was now convinced that his sheer strength of personality was sufficient to protect him from all ill. His art had not yet become a refuge for him, a master to be served; it was at this point something to be used for power and commanded by an incredible force of will.¹³⁴ This first stage of his life's philosophy was exemplified by finding meaning in life by achievement. This achievement was attained through strength of will power. Fate was seen as something "outside" which had to be overpowered. It was an enemy to be defied and beaten. His money, strong personality and good health made it possible for him to embrace this morality of power.

It would appear that Beethoven first noticed symptoms of his deafness when he was twenty-eight years of age. His first reaction, as might be expected, was rage at the senselessness of the hideous affliction. The thought that he, of all men, should lose this particular sense must have seemed the most abominable of ironies. Some excerpts from his letters reveal his feelings:

Your Beethoven is most unhappy, and at strife with nature and Creator. I have often cursed the latter for exposing his creatures to the merest accident, that often the most beautiful buds are broken or destroyed thereby. Only think that my noblest faculty, my hearing, has greatly deteriorated.¹³⁵

Although he feared the worst, he continued to hope and his

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 61. ¹³⁵Ibid., p. 68.

self-confidence remained indomitable:

A sad resignation to which I must resort although,
indeed, I am resolved to rise superior to every
obstacle.¹³⁶

He realized that he had to accept his fate but continued exerting his will to overcome it. As time progressed, his hearing grew worse and his health, in general, declined.

He attempted any cure that was suggested, all to no avail.

In a letter to his doctor friend, Wegeler, he states:

I can say I am living a wretched life; for two years I have avoided almost all social gatherings because it is impossible for me to say to people: 'I am deaf.' If I belonged to any other profession it would be easier, but in my profession it is an awful state

I have often cursed my existence. Plutarch taught me resignation. If possible I will bid defiance to my fate, although there will be moments in my life when I shall be the unhappiest of God's creatures Resignation! What a wretched refuge--and yet the only one open to me¹³⁷

Beethoven pleaded with those who knew of his increasing deafness to keep it a secret. He could not face the humiliation. His letters showed increased anguish but his strength of will was not yet destroyed: "No! I cannot endure it. I will take Fate by the throat; it shall not wholly overcome me."¹³⁸ His reaction to the impending calamity was defiance. He felt that he must assert his will and summon up all his strength in order to go on living and working in spite of his malady. He believed that he must vigilantly defend his creative power against the "outside enemy" of Fate. His illnesses, however, grew worse in intensity and

¹³⁶Ibid. ¹³⁷Ibid., p. 70. ¹³⁸Ibid., p. 72.

duration.

In 1802, in his thirty-second year, a philosophical transition occurred. In the beginning of the year we found statements of strong will aimed at the protection of his creative gift. By autumn there was a marked change in perspective. He seemed to have gained the realization that his creativity was an independent and mighty force using him as a channel or servant. The beginning of this radical philosophical departure is found in his Will, the famous Heiligenstadt Testament, which was not found until after his death. It marks the collapse of the old morality of power. As this testament represents a deep confession and revelation it really deserves reading in full. However, I will extract from it:

O ye men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn or misanthropic, how greatly do ye wrong me, you do not know the secret causes of my seeming ... I was compelled early to isolate myself, to live in loneliness ... and yet it was impossible for me to say to men: Speak louder, shout, for I am deaf. Ah how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which should have been more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I once possessed in highest perfection ... No I cannot do it, therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would gladly mingle with you ... I must live like an exile, if I approach near to people a hot terror seizes upon me, a fear that I may be subjected to the danger of letting my condition be observed ... but what a humiliation when one stood beside me and heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or one heard the shepherd singing and again I heard nothing, such incidents brought me to the verge of despair, but little more and I would have put an end to my life--only art it was that withheld me, ah it seemed impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt called upon to produce ... Patience I am told I must choose as my guide. I have done so. I hope my determination will remain firm to endure until it pleases the inexorable Parcae to break the thread, perhaps I shall get better, perhaps not, I am prepared. To you brother Carl I give special thanks

for the attachment you have displayed towards me of late. It is my wish that your lives may be better and freer from care than I have had, recommend virtue to your children, it alone can give happiness, not money, I speak from experience, it was virtue that upheld me in misery, to it next to my art I owe the fact that I did not end my life by suicide. Thus do I take my farewell of thee--yes that beloved hope which I brought with me when I came here to be cured at least in a degree--I must wholly abandon ... even the high courage--which often inspired me in the beautiful days of summer--has disappeared--O Providence--grant me at least but one day of pure joy--it is so long since real joy echoed in my heart--O when, O Divine One--shall I find it again in the temple of nature and of men--Never? no--O that would be too hard.¹³⁹

This Last Will and Testament marks a crisis in Beethoven's life as well as the onset of the second stage in his philosophical development. Never again was his attitude toward life one of defiance, where the defiance was an expression of what could be called his "strength of character." He no longer had a need for defiance as he no longer had any fear of losing his creative powers. By reaching the depths of depression and despair and coming close to taking his own life, he became aware of an indomitable creative energy within himself that nothing could destroy. A rigid and strained defiance was no longer necessary. What he came to see as his most urgent task was to learn deep submission--to accept and become one with the suffering. It was no longer viewed as separate from him and to be avoided.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Ibid., pp. 73-76; Dr. A. C. Kalischer, Beethoven's Letters, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), pp. 38-40.

¹⁴⁰Sullivan, Beethoven--His Spiritual Development, p. 78.

Thus, the second stage is marked by the acceptance of suffering and submission to it. He now had faith in his continued achievement. It is usual to find that the Eroica Symphony marks this turning point in his life. In Beethoven's early music, his experiences of life are expressed not as a mastered synthetic whole, but as moods. He would be sombre, melancholy, gay or anything else, but these emotions do not form an organic totality. He portrayed these feelings as clear and separate, not as integrated, simultaneous emotions. Although the music did possess spiritual qualities it did not represent a unified, spiritual whole.¹⁴¹ Therefore, it is when we come to the Eroica that we find the beginning of what could be termed the music in the main line of Beethoven's spiritual development. In fact, the change from the earlier music seems to be so startling that it points to an almost catastrophic change or some kind of extremely rapid acceleration in the synthesis of his emotions into music. This change followed the Heiligenstadt Testament. Sullivan states:

The whole work (Eroica) is a miraculously realized expression of a supremely important experience, and is justly regarded as a turning point in Beethoven's music. Beethoven was here speaking of what was perhaps the cardinal experience of his life, that when, with all his strength and courage, he had been reduced to despair, that when the conscious strong man had tasted very death, there came this turbulent, irrepressible, deathless creative energy surging up from depths he had not suspected.¹⁴²

The years from the Heiligenstadt Testament (1802) through

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 88. ¹⁴²Ibid., p. 91.

the second stage of his spiritual development were long and arduous. He continued composing until about 1809, when he entered a relatively dormant period which lasted until 1817. During this unproductive period he was in the process of assimilating another root experience, which by its very nature had to be gradually realized. These years found Beethoven in a turbulent emotional condition. His creative ability had steadily increased, and he had found a way of life which, in spite of his affliction, was acceptable to him. It was during this time that Beethoven was concerned with finding a wife and fulfilling his full human potential. He saw love and companionship as the answer to the isolation of his life and the loneliness of his progressing deafness.¹⁴³ Why he did not marry is a matter of conjecture. Suffice it to say that it was a great and deep disappointment to Beethoven when he realized that he was never to experience this aspect of life. His impending solitude was one of the things he found hardest to accept. The full and resigned acceptance of his irrevocable and profound loneliness was one of the last and greatest of Beethoven's victories. This terrible yearning and heartache was expressed in one of his last and most intimate confessions, the Cavatina of the B flat quartet, of which Beethoven said that never did his own music move him so much. There is a sorrow without hope, sorrow for what is irrevocable and a longing for what has not been

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 115.

and never will be.¹⁴⁴

During this second stage of his spiritual development and through his unproductive years, his work possessed less and less of the warm human confidence of a man who knows that victory lies ahead. It progressively displayed a stark, bare resolution. It was colder, and although not without courage, it was more grim. The Hammerclavier Sonata is the complete expression of this synthesis. It is the culmination of sixteen years of development in perception. At the time he wrote it his realization of his essential loneliness was terrible and complete. The Hammerclavier Sonata is the expression of a man of infinite suffering, of infinite courage and will, but without God and without hope. It was only after this Sonata that his greatest work was achieved. It marked the end of a long and painful process in his development and the beginning of his last and most profound stage.

The third stage of his spiritual growth is marked by his assimilation and perception of suffering. He came to an internalized realization that suffering not only had to be accepted and submitted to, but should be understood as necessary and essential; a submission to suffering, not with resignation, but with gratitude. The only thing left for him was to merge his private aspirations into the aspirations of mankind at large. In order to transcend his own personal, subjective desires, he had to reach out to

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 124.

the universal, the eternal.¹⁴⁵

Little is known of Beethoven's religious views except for the fact that they were not orthodox. That he, towards the end of his life, came to possess a deep spiritual apprehension of life is undisputable. We may conclude from his own remarks that he believed in an ultimate, benign and intelligent Power, and that he believed existence to be purposeful. Such beliefs, so expressed, are mere shells that can contain a great variety of contents. His convictions were probably better expressed in the mystical sentences he was fond of copying down from Eastern literature. The oriental sensitivities probably better expressed, through their very vagueness, Beethoven's intuitions as to the nature of life and the meaning of existence.¹⁴⁶

The Ninth Symphony is the beginning of the ordering of this new mental region, this higher level of consciousness. The view of Fate in the Ninth Symphony is no longer seen as a powerful enemy that sufficient courage can defy. It is now viewed as a truly universal destiny, too complete to evoke any thought of resistance.¹⁴⁷ The Ninth Symphony stands out as a turning point just as the Eroica pointed to a new spiritual region in his earlier life. Beethoven's creative power was now at its height. Although it was now that he brought forth his greatest work, it came very much more slowly. What he now had to express was much more

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 137. ¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 141, 142.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 143.

difficult to formulate than anything he had previously expressed. The states of consciousness with which he was concerned contained more elusive elements and came from greater depths. The task of creation necessitated an unequalled degree of absorption and withdrawal from outward life. His deafness and solitude are almost symbolic of his complete retreat into his inner self. No "external storms" could now influence his work; they could at best temporarily interrupt it.¹⁴⁸ By the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven had so far surpassed the norm of great artists that he could no longer influence them. In his earlier work he had been concerned with states of consciousness that most of us could share. For this reason his earlier work influenced other musicians, in content as well as form. This was no longer the case.¹⁴⁹

The music of the last quartets comes from the profoundest depths of the human soul. It represents the greatest of Beethoven's music. Much of it is different in kind from any other music that he or anybody else ever wrote. In these quartets Beethoven explored new regions of his consciousness. All of the major, formative experiences of his life had been assimilated. These life experiences took on a very high degree of organization in his mental synthesis. The inner world to which Beethoven retreated was a living and developing world, even though it owed nothing to fresh contacts with the outside. When

¹⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 146, 147. ¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 150.

we come to the last quartets we find a still more remote spiritual content. Here we become aware not only of a new synthesis of spiritual elements but of radically new elements. The actual process of what we have called growth of consciousness is extremely obscure. When we speak of a new synthesis of spiritual elements, whether these elements be emotions or states of awareness or whatever we choose to call them, we must remember that the synthesis represents a definitely new state of consciousness and is not to be described by tabulating its individual elements.¹⁵⁰

To elaborate on the last string quartets: the quartet in C sharp Minor is thought to be the greatest, as Beethoven himself thought. It is also the most mystical. The opening fugue is the most superhuman piece of music that Beethoven ever wrote. It is the completely unfaltering rendering into music of what we can only call the mystic vision. Sullivan states:

Nowhere else in music are we made so aware, as here, of a state of consciousness surpassing our own, where our problems do not exist and to which even our highest aspirations, those that we can formulate, provide no key. Those faint and troubling intimations we sometimes have of a vision different from and yet including our own, of a way of apprehending life, passionless, perfect and complete, that resolves all our discords, are here presented ...¹⁵¹

In these last quartets the movements radiate, as it were, from a central experience. They do not represent stages in a journey, each stage being independent and existing in

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 151. ¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 159.

its own right. They represent separate experiences but the meaning they take on in the quartets is derived from their relation to a dominating central theme. This is characteristic of the mystic vision, to which everything in the world appears unified in the light of one fundamental experience and understanding.¹⁵² It represents a state in which the apparently opposing elements of life are seen as necessary and no longer in opposition. Beethoven had come to realize that his creative energy, rather than being in opposition to his destiny, in reality owed its very life to that destiny. It is not merely that he believed that the price was worth paying; he came to see it as necessary that a price be paid. To be willing to suffer in order to create is one thing, but to realize that one's creation necessitates one's suffering and is a result of one's suffering is quite another. To see suffering as one of the greatest of life's gifts is to reach a solution to the problem of good and evil, and all opposites, and reach a higher level of consciousness, where one is no longer bound by opposition.¹⁵³

Language, as we have had occasion to remark, is poor in descriptions for subjective states, and this poverty becomes particularly apparent when we try to describe such works of art as the last quartets. A spiritual synthesis or advanced level of awareness contains contradictory elements existing simultaneously, which necessarily eludes

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 154. ¹⁵³Ibid., p. 155.

logical critique. All art exists to communicate states of consciousness which are higher synthetic wholes than those of ordinary experience, but in these last quartets Beethoven reached unexcelled levels. Sullivan is not inclined to assert that Beethoven's music is more beautiful than any other music. However, he is willing to defend it as greater than other music, which on the whole was the general opinion ever since it appeared. This greatness depends on what we have called its spiritual content, and that is something that the listener perceives directly, even though he may be entirely unable to rationally or verbally formulate it.¹⁵⁴ The spiritual content of Beethoven's music therefore speaks of simultaneous existence and resolution of opposites. Beethoven's attitude and perception of the nature of existence and the purpose of life, as experienced in his music, owes nothing to the mediation of his intelligence. The synthesis of experience that is achieved by a great artist proceeds according to laws of which we know little, but purely intellectual formulation plays a very small part in it. If Beethoven reached the state, as Sullivan believes he did, where he achieved the "submission" he felt to be so necessary, it was not through any process of reasoning. His late work is the work of a man who has known suffering and conflict, but whose conflicts are now reminiscent. If ever a mystical vision of life has been presented in art it is here, with

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 165.

Beethoven. In these moments of illumination Beethoven reached that state of consciousness that only the great mystics have reached, where there is no discord; and in reaching it he retained the whole of his experience of life--he denied nothing.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 161.

CONCLUSION

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is just one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.¹⁵⁶

This quote by William James opened the Chapter on Zen Buddhism. It is relevant not only to that Chapter but to the entire paper. The analogy of a screen is very appropriate. When perception changes it is as if a screen lifts and suddenly vision becomes clear. It is without effort and filled with joy--one of life's most amazing moments. Nothing is ever quite the same again. There are infinite levels of this experience, from the quick shallow flashes of everyday life to the most deeply profound enlightenments.

In conclusion, I would simply like to clarify that nowhere in this thesis do I mean to imply that the level of consciousness of a creative person is the same as an enlightened state--it definitely is not. Nor do I want to incinuate that a creative mind, no matter how disciplined, will reach an enlightened state--this does not occur. I merely wish to illustrate that while these levels of consciousness and perception are not the same, they are not entirely different.

¹⁵⁶Capra, The Tao of Physics, p. 17.

Art that is not based in egocentricity also comes from this source. It represents a human need to understand and express what is deeply felt in one's common human consciousness. It is a way of making manifest the deepest psychic and personal experiences of life.

Often, in trying to understand something, we focus on the things that make the differences. In this case I've tried to give a feeling for the peripheral likenesses, the subtle similarities. All of these experiences, although separated by degree, emanate from one human source. In their essence, they echo each other.

My perceptions of the spiritual aspects of creativity are not a byproduct of my reading and research. Rather, my feelings and views were clear and existent and with them in mind I set out to do research that would expand and exemplify what I believed. This is an important distinction.

My views are the result of seven years of Zen training. Early in this endeavor I came upon a sentence that had tremendous impact on me. It read, "The source of mind is completely calm."¹⁵⁷ This mind refers not to the compulsive, ever racing conscious mind, but to Mind with the capital "M". This statement felt deeply and intuitively right. My Zen training has been the search to see if this is true. I find it to be so.

¹⁵⁷ Albert Low, "The Ceremony of Ordination," Zen Bow, Vol. II, No. 1 (1978), p. 3.

This calm is a calm without rejecting chaos. In fact, calm and chaos not seen as separate and with no connotations of positive or negative.

Given this perception, along with the deep affinity for all that I presented in the thesis, I can look at my work and reflect on certain things. Perhaps a place to start is with what my work is not. It is not about exploration of specific techniques in metal. The techniques are important only as a means to achieve what I want to express. I find no seduction in specific materials or processes for reasons other than this. The work is not about challenge or confrontation. Rather, it is there to illustrate a specific contemplative mood or emotion. It is a footprint of a deep feeling of calm and balance. It represents a state of equilibrium.

The work is all reductive in nature. The idea of taking away to the point where one more step is too much is very intriguing to me. Where is that point? There are parallels here to Zen training. Zen concerns dropping preconceived ideas and looking at things freshly. It involves questioning and the willingness to let go. In this, it is also reductive. Reducing to find "essence" in yourself or your work is a life-long task. It does not provide one with a feeling of security but rather continually unsettles the foundations of one's seemingly solid world.

So many defenses have been built up. So many comfortable assumptions have been added as padding to protect from all that is unknown. The necessity and willingness to strip away one's ideas and see what's left is initially frightening. Knowing when and where to stop has its difficulties.

In artwork, it is easy to overwhelm with sheer technique and intellectual bravura. People enjoy being overpowered by the obvious. It is reassuring in that it confirms the viewers security in being able to respond. I deliberately attempt to give less. The technique speaks quietly. There is no color or high shine to seduce. Superficially, the work can be read as simple or minimal-neither of which it is. In fact, the visual complexity and emotional response that can be engendered by one or two cuts in a bar of metal is really quite astounding. But it's effect on the viewer is subtle.

The approach to and conception of the work also happens in a similar manner. When the need to work emerges it is dealt with. I find struggling to produce this state artificial. The need is within and it is contradictory to allow outside forces to dictate your internal time clock. This does not mean one should overreact and reject all deadlines or outside pressures. Very often they can spur and hasten the creative process. But I feel it is important to clearly understand from where and whom the need to work arises.

I also do not mean to insinuate that all stages of the work are encased in calm and serenity. As is the case in any creative process, there is hard work and frustration. However, here it is a natural part of the process and not an artificial stimulant used to try to induce the creative need or activity.

In Zen training there is no hierarchy of endeavor. In the West there is such a tendency to fragment things that it is allowable to do one thing carelessly while devoting great care and concern to another. Not only is this attitude allowable, but it is promoted. There is also the tendency to think that this is the "normal" way of seeing and doing. In Zen training, one becomes sensitive to the fallacy in this approach. Until you pay full attention to everything done, down to the seemingly most mundane task, it is impossible to truly understand the significance of any action. For example, to cut a vegetable with full awareness-seeing that vegetable as if for the first time-seeing it without the conceptions of what the word vegetable might mean-seeing it without clouding the perception with all the images and ideas of what that object represents or has represented. This may sound humorous but it is no easy task. It is a deep seeing and a "not knowing." Anything done with this intensity, openness and resulting awareness is a powerful experience. One is made to see how almost impossible it is to be thoroughly attentive even for just a moment.

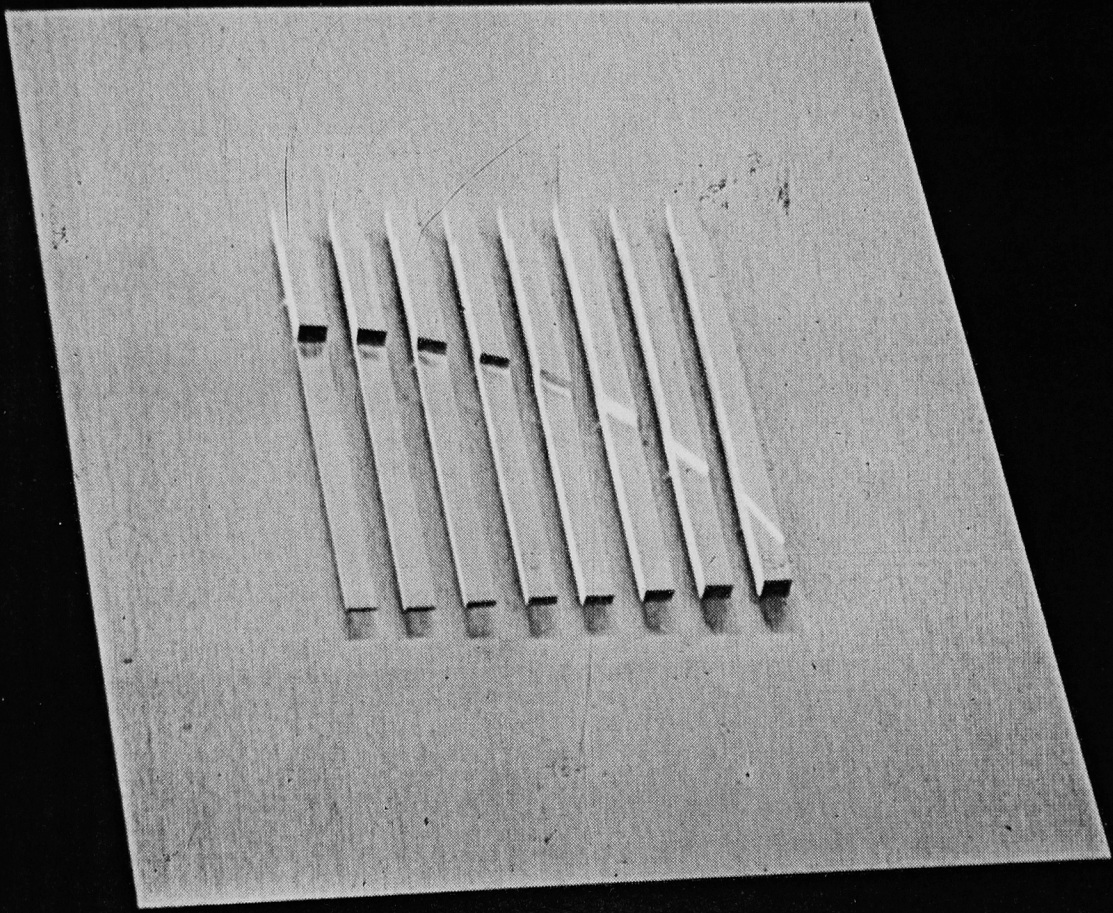
In light of these ideas, where does my work place? For the viewer, it still undoubtedly places it on a more significant plane than I myself would place it. As the maker, I see it as a part, only a part, yet not separate from many other endeavors. Is there a real difference between how I approach a piece of sculpture or how I do zazen or how I give love to others or how I react to frustration? Naturally, on the surface there is a difference, but in reality, they are profoundly similar. One is not a segmented being, even though our conscious mind is so fond of categorizing. This departmentalization can prove a useful tool, but it is definitely not the only way to experience life. Our belief that we are separate from everything around us is a delusion. These are not hollow words. They can be deeply experienced and through that experience one's perception and understanding changes.

The work, therefore, is a reflection of a place in time, a manifestation of an emotion that is not exclusively specific to that time but rather a live and ongoing event. On a profound level, this present moment is neither separate from that work nor is it of greater or lesser importance. It too is an echo and holds a peripheral likeness to all else.

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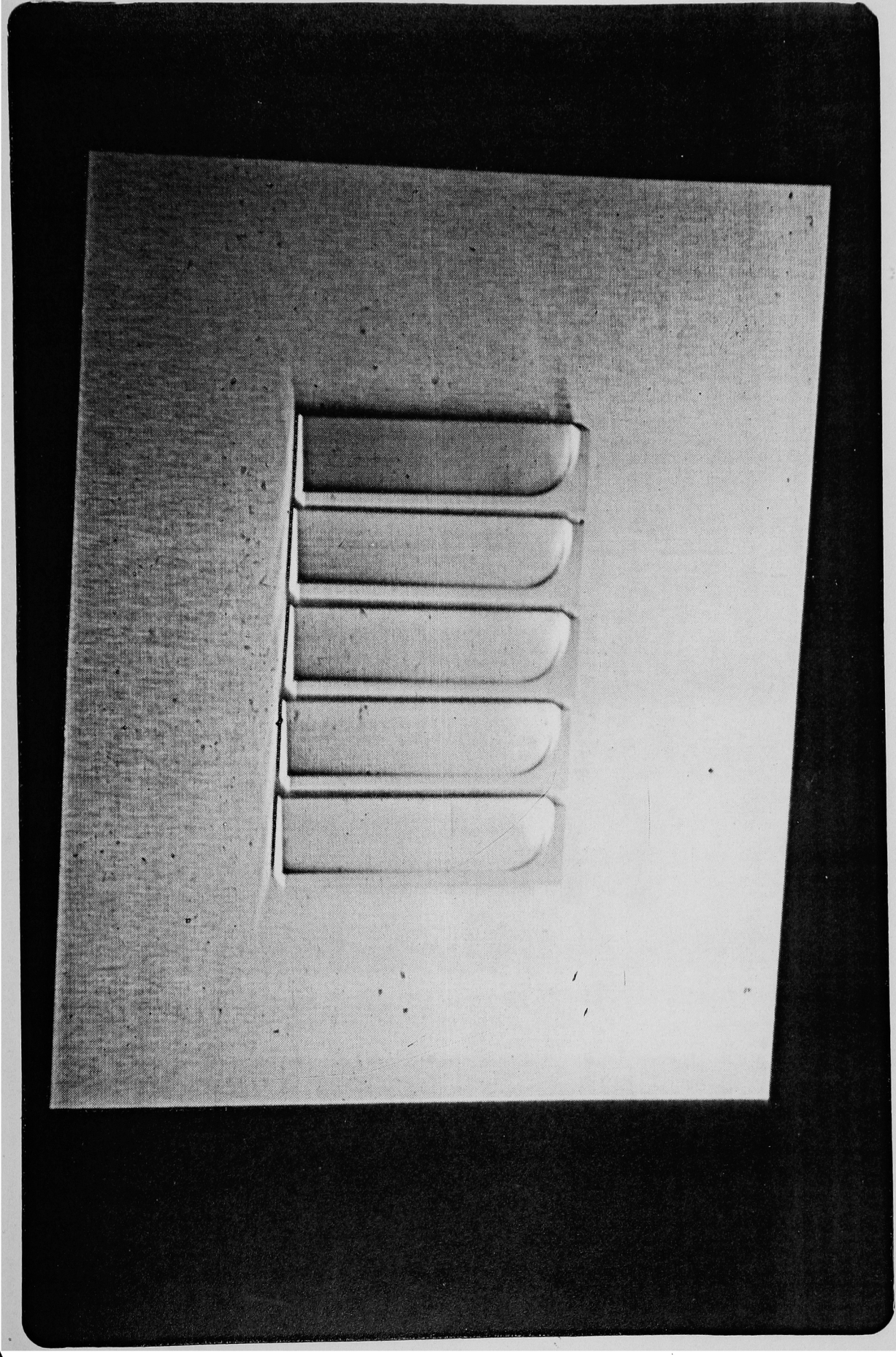
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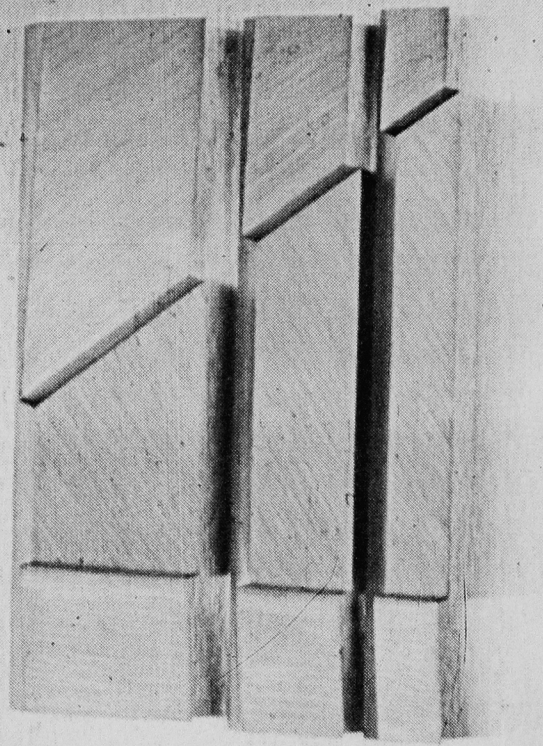
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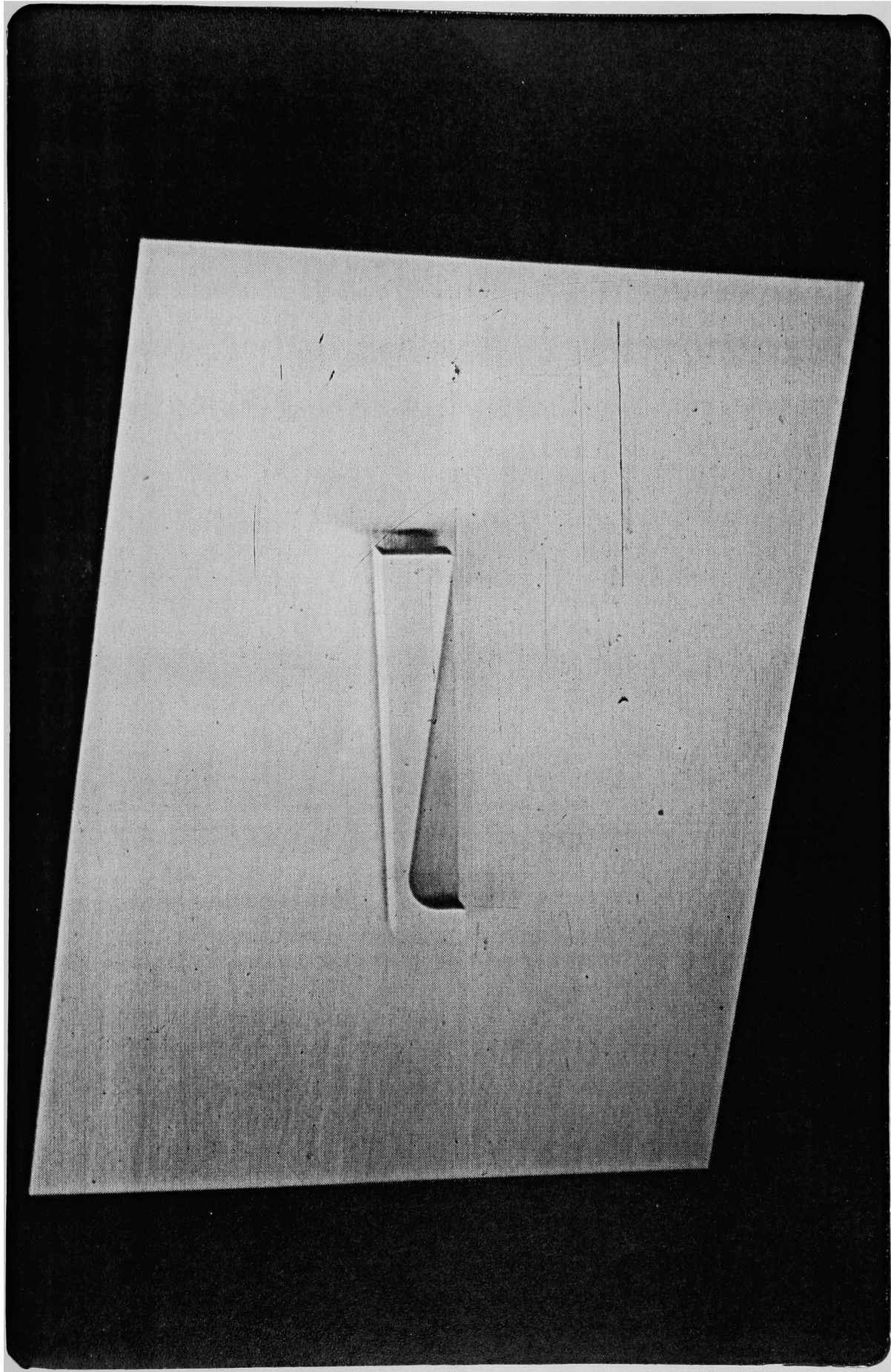
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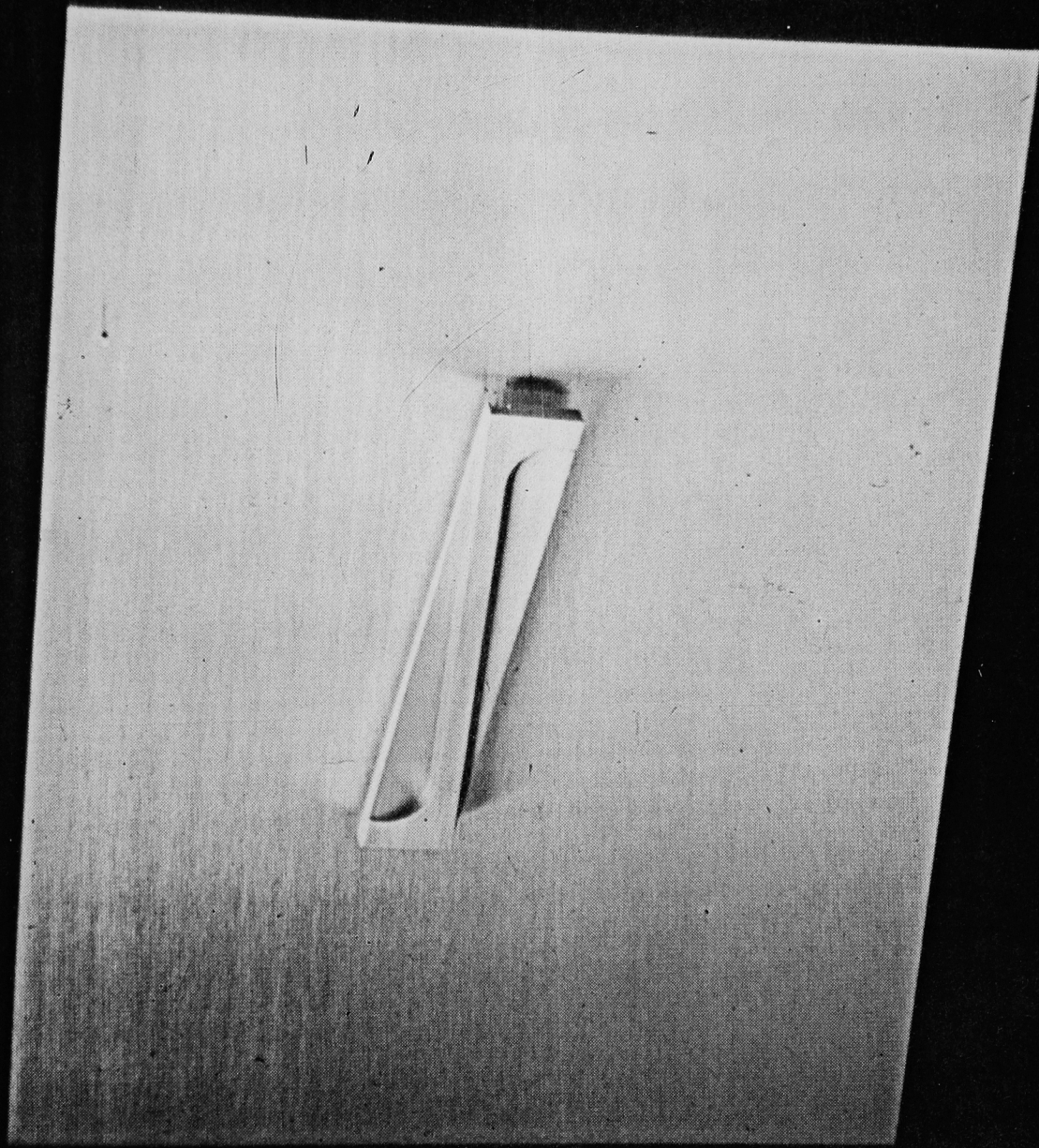
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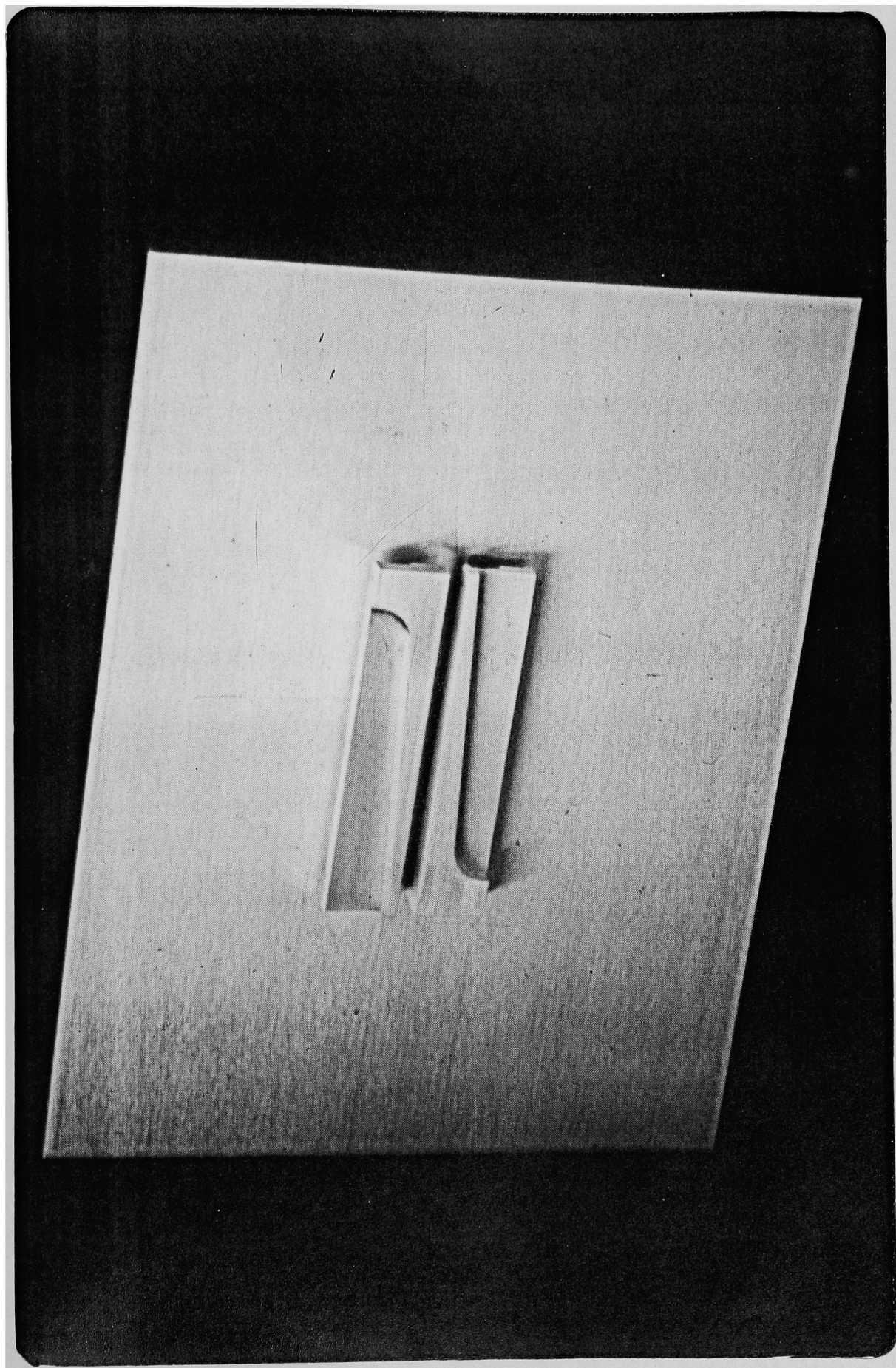
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